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**THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

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## Table of Contents

Session 1: Introduction	1-5
Session 2: Introduction continued	6-24
Session 3: Aristophanes, <i>Clouds</i>	25-45
Session 4: Aristophanes, <i>Clouds</i>	46-71
Session 5: Aristophanes, <i>Birds</i>	72-90
Session 6: Aristophanes, <i>Birds</i>	91-125
Session 7: Aristophanes, <i>Birds</i> , <i>Wasps</i>	126-145
Session 8: Aristophanes, <i>Wasps</i>	146-171
Session 9: Plato, <i>Apology</i> 17-21b	172-198
Session 10: <i>Apology</i> 21b-26e	199-224
Session 11: <i>Apology</i> 27a-31a	225-250
Session 12: <i>Apology</i> 32a-37b	251-280
Session 13: <i>Apology</i> 37b-end	281-310
Session 14: Plato, <i>Crito</i>	311-343

## Session 1: no date<sup>i</sup>

**Leo Strauss:** The origins of political science are in Greece, and more particularly in Socrates. Therefore we will deal with Socrates in this course. Socrates did not write, so we must depend on men who wrote about him, as Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato [did]. There is a problem of who gives the right account. Aristophanes is not a sober reporter; the same may be true of the others. We will read the *Apology*, *Crito*, *Clouds*, *Birds*, and *Wasps*. We will deal with this group only because Xenophon's *Memorabilia* is not available.

The subject is suggested because as political scientists we want to understand political phenomena. Now political science is generally said to be the empirical study of those phenomena. But the question arises: What is relevant? That Mr. X voted is not itself relevant. We have to see his relevance in another light, as a type of voter. We come to the question: What is the whole to which the political things must be relevant? "Political" is derived from *polis*, a form of living together independently of others. The *polis* no longer exists, so we have to look now for some other whole to find what is politically relevant. Perhaps this is the state, but the *polis* is not equivalent to the state. Today, by "state" we mean something in contradistinction to something else: society. The former whole, the *polis*, is today split into two things, state and society. The preponderant view is that society is more comprehensive and fundamental than the state. This leads to the conclusion that a true understanding of political phenomena is sociological, that the study of politics should be absorbed by sociology.

But there is a difficulty. What is society? What is meant by it? Doesn't the term owe its reputation to the fact that it is unbelievably vague? For example, are we a society? Are all men living on earth a society? No. Are we in this room a society? No. When we say "our society," what do we mean? We mean *American* society, drawn by our political boundaries. *Polis* is precise, society is not.

Another view of determining relevance is one which makes the larger whole the world-historical process. This is Marx. Now the trend is toward a world-state society, hence relevance depends on how an event relates to this trend. But does this help? The situation in the middle of the twentieth century is unique. No political analysis of anything going on can be adequate without an awareness of this uniqueness. But what is the meaning of this uniqueness? In every age, there is something which we can call a basic opinion by which men are united, even in their fights—for religious wars presuppose that religion is worth fighting for. So what is the ruling opinion of our age? If we look at Western countries, we can say it is democracy, and the other element of the uniqueness is science. The ruling opinion is democracy and science in such a way that the two are in basic harmony. The method of democracy is the method of intelligence. Whereas democracy is the ruling opinion in many states, science is ruling everywhere.

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<sup>i</sup> There is no audiofile for this session. Noted in the original transcript: "Not taken from tape." Presumably the text of this session is based upon student notes.

For the first time, there is one ruling opinion. This is unique. Strictly speaking, science can't be an authority accepted blindly, and yet modern science takes on this character. Man takes this faith: that man can be united through the quest for or respect for truth, in and through reason. This hope can be called rationalism. This is the basic stratum of our present opinion. In the West, what is most characteristic of scientific reason? What does reason mean for us in the West? We might expect it to find out ends and the means to these ends. What about present-day scientific rationalism? We now have a distinction between facts and values. The ends of human life are, according to this distinction, irrational. Once the values have been posited, science can decide as to the means. This is a crucial difference between the victorious rationalism of today and the original premise of rationalism.

Originally the purpose of science was to discover relations, causes, laws, and not only facts. Science presupposes such a thing as causality. What about the modern status of this principle of causality? It is now regarded as a mere assumption. Modern rationalism bases its whole endeavor on a nonevident assumption. Science has today externally the greatest triumph: no society can resist it (whereas religion was superior to Newtonian cosmology), yet the triumph is hollow because the reason within science declares itself incompetent for the greatest purpose: deciding ends and the basic foundation of causality.

We could try to think of alternatives: either (a) question reason and find another way, e.g., revelation; or (b) not abandon reason, but question what reason has come to mean. Perhaps the belief that an evaluating social science is impossible must be revised. Perhaps we have to recover this notion. In simple terms, perhaps traditional political philosophy is not as bad as it is seen to be. Traditional political philosophy was an evaluating social science.

But we must consider a fundamental ambiguity about traditional political philosophy. Within the tradition there is a fundamental break at a certain moment. There are two radically different conceptions: the classical view and the modern view. Most of the criticism of traditional political philosophy is based on an understanding of modern political philosophy and a criticism of classical thought in the light of this modern understanding.

We proceed in a simple way, seeking a criterion to distinguish a tradition. How does it divide human knowledge? How, for example, does Aristotle divide it? If we can understand this we can see what the quarrel is between the ancients and the moderns. The real quarrel is in the field of philosophy and science. For Aristotle, all the sciences could be fundamentally divided into two parts: the theoretical, which included mathematics, physics, and metaphysics; and the practical, which included ethics, economics, and politics. Today the distinction between theory and practice is abolished, and the idea that philosophy and science are the same is dropped. Up to the seventeenth century, what we call science now didn't exist, because what we call science is not philosophic. There was not prior to the seventeenth century any physics as physics: what existed was within a system, as an Aristotelian physics or an Epicurean physics. This was not so with the practical arts; shoemaking and to some extent logic were developed according to the inherent qualities of shoemaking and logic. But in the seventeenth century a metaphysically neutral physics developed. Today a distinction is drawn between philosophy and science. Today some of the divisions of philosophy are epistemology, logic, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of language,

philosophy of history, and philosophy of religion. We wouldn't include metaphysics, because that it is not hocus-pocus is not undisputed.

In Aristotle, the theoretical is the higher kind of knowledge; and within the theoretical, metaphysics is the highest. If metaphysics were dropped, then physics would be highest. But in the modern division, what is the highest in actual practice is not stated. But what do all the things listed above have in common? A study of the human soul or human mind: human psychology. Philosophy is no longer cosmology, concern with the whole, but primarily concerned with man. For example, philosophy of religion didn't exist in former times. God, toward whom religion attracts, is not the object of philosophy of religion but the human attitude toward God is. Another example: in the Middle Ages the principle of human conduct was called the natural law. In modern times people still talked of it, but later talked of the rights of man. The natural was replaced by man. The natural law was also law for man, but the whole was emphasized, whereas "the rights of man" doesn't refer to anything but man. Kant, a contemporary of Tom Paine, explicitly abolished the old terminology. He called the new phenomenon the law of freedom. Also, law was replaced by right. In the older view order came first, secondarily giving rise to rights; but in the new view man's rights became primary and order became secondary: the primacy of man against the primacy of order.

Another example: Regarding aesthetics, in the ancient teaching the equivalent of what we call aesthetics was poetics. According to this older view, poetry was an imitation, not a creation or making. In the modern view the fine arts are created. In the older view the artist was dependent; now he is autonomous, he creates. In the ancient view things belonged to a whole from which they took meaning. But if meaning originates in man, then we have to have logic because the mind gives all meaning. The notion of "conquest of nature" means there is something in man which allows him to stay outside and conquer the whole. The distinction between theoretical and practical is abolished. (The difference between theoretical and practical is not the same as that between theoretical and applied. Practical science does not presuppose the theoretical as does the applied.)

Abolition of the distinction between theoretical and practical means we no longer believe in a fundamental difference between a man devoting himself to theory—contemplation, not construction, as theory means today; "theory" originally meant a looking at something, a procession—and one who devoted himself to practical, nonphilosophic things. This distinction between the philosophic and the nonphilosophic man was more basic than the distinction between slaves and masters. The ancients believed that the nonphilosophic man had a different object in life than the philosophic man. In modern life we think the object of all men is or can be the same, so the philosopher or scientist can serve all men. Science is for the sake of power. In modern times the view prevails that intellectual progress and social progress are identical. With improvement of the mind, social progress will come inevitably. In the older view, man can't be united by reason; the modern view implies that they can be.

Before we can consider the suggestion that social science is possible, we must understand the cleavage in the meaning of social science, which corresponds to the difference between the ancients and the moderns.

The distinction between the philosophic and nonphilosophic man is more fundamental than that between the gentleman and his opposite. The gentleman bows to respectable authority. He likes the graces above all. He doesn't think and question; he dislikes pettiness but, in a way and because of this dislike, is petty.

In the early seventeenth century, Bacon, Descartes, and Hobbes held that science is no longer to be cultivated for its own sake but for its fruits, which fruits are available to all men. All the enormous efforts of technology are means to fruits, which are accessible to all. But if the efforts were the end, then they would be available only to those who are qualified by training and nature.

The immediate subject of this seminar is classical political philosophy. The modern tradition is derivative. This is true even if modern social science is the end of all wisdom. The proposal of practical political philosophy is the natural one to seek, that we should have an evaluating reason. That we should cut this out is based on a complicated experiment which allegedly shows that an evaluating political philosophy is impossible. Even if the present-day notion were the last word, it would still need justification, and this justification is available only with reference to what preceded. In any modern social science, we have a polemical reference to the ancients. There is a heritage of rejection of the ancients, no longer based on ancient texts.

There is a practical difficulty in studying the original form of social science. Socratic political philosophy presents itself as a quest for the best regime. Socrates doesn't admit the possibility of society without regime. The character of the best regime is determined by the character of association. It is determined ultimately by the nature of man. Plato's *Laws* and *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* are all determined by this. This best regime is an ideal, distinguished from everything real. It could become real, but it is not of its essence to be real. The ideal is derived from *idea*. What did "idea" mean for Socrates? Idea is that which is truly; everything else is a poor imitation of that which alone truly is. Ideas are separate, eternal, unchangeable. This is in contradistinction to what is mixed, which comes into being and passes away. But in Plato's works the theme is not the idea, but Socrates in the flesh, the mortal Socrates.

Socratic political philosophy is the quest for the best regime, i.e., [the regime] which is best for man as man. It is a universal theme, yet is not presented to us in treatises but in the form of dialogues, with individual characters and proper names. The individual Socrates becomes the theme. Why? Because the best regime of the *polis* is somehow the same as the best order of the individual himself. In order to understand the best regime, we have also to look at the best human individual. We could say that Socrates is merely the best man whom Plato happened to meet. Is this sufficient?

Socratic political philosophy is accessible to us only from Plato and Xenophon, because Socrates did not write. Yet Plato doesn't write in his own name. Plato's doctrine is indistinguishable from Socrates's. All efforts to distinguish are purely hypothetical. Plato's writing is as unique as Socrates's not writing, because Plato appears only in his Socrates. This is the only such case in thought. Socrates had to be characterized properly because he was a contemporary, not like Homer's Achilles. Socrates's public activity was talk. He was a citizen and never left home,

except to fight. He is always in the center, always begins with the obvious. Plato was a private man: [he] wrote, traveled. He was not so much a citizen; he was detached.

Other non-Socratic dialogues always begin from above, but Socrates always begins in the middle. His thinking has the character of an ascent from the here and now. Ascent is always followed by a descent. This is not a peculiarity of Socrates's thinking but is characteristic of all right thought. It cannot begin from above. The fundamental question is never solved, and therefore Socrates's knowledge is inseparable from a kind of ignorance. Socrates raises questions rather than gives answers.

We live not in the highest principles but only in the element of the derivative. Socrates became the theme because the best life is the philosophic, questioning life, as actually lived. Therefore Socrates could be chosen by Plato.

## Session 2: no date

**Leo Strauss:** Before we turn—Mr. Metzel. Where’s Mr. Metzel? Oh, ya. You have prepared your paper, but we still need some more introductory remarks. A few points I mentioned last time. I’ll state them in a very general way again.

If we start from our situation today, which affects all political matters as well as all thinking about political matters, we can say that we are the contemporaries of the greatest triumph of rationalism, and at the same time we are more aware, more obviously aware, of the hollowness of that triumph. The original project of that rationalism was this: man’s universal and lasting happiness should be brought about by the conquest of nature, by the production of abundance and all its implications. That is still around and by no means insignificant, but to speak only of the most obvious level, the awareness is today more common that abundance and its implication[s],<sup>1</sup> and freedom and all the other things are not sufficient to solve the problem of the individual. But here modern man has developed a supplement to the political and social arrangements, and that is psychology, especially in the form of psychoanalysis. The dissatisfaction with society, however satisfactory society may be, is a lack of adjustment, and therefore one has to bring about adjustment by the psychological, psychopathological means.

I mention a few other points which illustrate the situation. For example, there is the project of a science of public administration, which claims to bring about a degree of efficiency which prescientific public administration is incapable to achieve. In the words of Herbert Simon, who is especially responsible for that development, the older view and the older thought of public administration is based on a kind of popular wisdom, proverbs. That has to be replaced by a scientific study of public administration.<sup>1</sup> If we look a bit behind this formula, we see this: a human activity, which was traditionally thought to be a sphere of common sense, a sphere<sup>2</sup> of practical wisdom, of prudence, is now to be taken over by science. And that is of general application. The distinction between practical wisdom or prudence and science has lost its elegance. This has something to do with what I said last time about the abolition of the difference between theory and practice, between theoretical sciences and practical science. Practical sciences were meant to be forms of practical wisdom or prudence. This distinction has lost its significance.

Another example is the substitution of *prediction*, scientific prediction, for *guesses*. Guesses, informed guesses of experienced men, are regarded as inferior to genuine predictions, and they would be inferior if prediction were possible. Behind the basis of this whole project, as it is still very powerful today, is this: there is no essential difference between man and the brutes, between life and nonlife.<sup>3</sup> At first glance there are very striking differences, we all know, but the more science progresses, the more these differences will prove to be purely provisional. And the project of which you surely have heard, if only from the daily papers, of thinking machines which “quote think unquote” as well as man, or perhaps better than man, is a necessary consequence of it. If there is no essential difference between men and brutes, between life and

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<sup>i</sup> Herbert A. Simon, “The Proverbs of Administration,” *Public Administration Review* 6 (1946): 53-67.



nonlife, then there cannot be an essential difference between sufficiently clever machines and clever men. I read, on the occasion of this meeting here at Christmastime of the scientists, a statement made by Norbert Wiener, who is well known as the representative of this view, and I think this statement is very revealing—although I must<sup>4</sup> make this remark with a qualification: I have not read the paper by Professor Wiener; I have read only the newspaper report, which may be wrong. But he seems to have said that one of the major dangers to which we are now exposed is that these clever thinking machines may take over; they may crush us.<sup>ii</sup> Now if he really said that, one would say: Why did he build them in the first place? And why does he continue building them? Why does he not stop immediately, with such a danger? And secondly, if they are really thinking machines, thinking beings, if they really think, why does he not try to negotiate with them a settlement by virtue of which we might survive? [Laughter] After all, if they are very clever, one could show them that as servants of these machines, a kind of slaves, the humans could still fulfill an important function. [Laughter] Now this—well, you laugh about it, but you must admit that this is simply a reaction of ordinary common sense to this proposal. This common sense is excluded from any consideration by definition by this kind of people. So this truly is ridiculous, but it is at the same time also a weeping matter, not only laughing matter.

Now the hollowness of this proposal, of this hope, appears from a number of considerations. The most obvious one is not so much the thinking machines as the undeniable fact that man, who has developed this tremendous technological apparatus, is by virtue of this apparatus enabled to destroy himself. No such possibility existed in former times. Individuals could destroy themselves, but<sup>5</sup> some individuals could [not] destroy the whole human race.

On a more theoretical level, this science, this modern science on which our well-being depends, is by its very nature incomplete. It lives in a horizon of infinite progress. The very idea that at a certain moment all scientific problems could have been solved is incompatible with this notion of science. But if this is so, that means that the whole which is studied by that science will always remain mysterious, because all progress is taking place in time. There is not infinite time at our disposal, and science<sup>6</sup> [by] its nature would become complete only in infinite progress. The fundamental mysteriousness is in fact admitted by that science, but it conceals that fact. What is in the foreground is the promise of ever-greater progress, of ever-greater rationality, but this does not [do] away with the permanent, persistent, fundamental nonrationality. The fundamental situation of man, that is to say, can never be changed because the mystery would always remain.

Another point to which I referred last time is that the principle of all scientific investigation, causality,<sup>7</sup> appears now to be a mere assumption and not an evident principle. The fourth and last point is the one with which we are immediately concerned as social scientists: the distinction between facts and values. And that means, practically, that reason is incompetent in the decisive respect, for all questions—all practical questions, at any rate—have to do with means for ends: the means are meaningful only in the light of the ends; and<sup>8</sup> if the ends cannot be shown to be sound or unsound by reason, the rationality of the whole enterprise remains undecided. An

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<sup>ii</sup> Strauss might be referring to Murray Illson, "Mankind Warned of Machine Peril: Robot 'Brain' Can Destroy Its Creators and Users, Prof. Wiener Declares," *New York Times*, 17 May 1959. Illson refers to a lecture given by Wiener at New York University on "The Brain and the Machine." For Wiener's published view, cf. Norbert Wiener, "Some Moral and Technical Consequences of Automation," *Science*, New Series (1960): 1355-1358.

implication of that fact-value distinction is that science cannot, or reason cannot, establish the goodness of science itself. It cannot answer the question: Why science? It can of course say science is good *for* that; for example, medicine is good *for* health. But why health? This question is a question which can no longer be raised, which can no longer be taken up. The answer which was formerly available in a more unsophisticated age said “Science is evidently useful for human life, for human survival” is today an assertion which cannot make any impression on anyone, because science is not necessary for human survival. On the contrary, science creates a danger to human survival which did not exist before.

The question: Is reason, as it has been cultivated throughout the ages, a delusion? Or does not the error lie in a certain understanding of reason? And it is this understanding which came into the fore in the last centuries.

In application to political matters, is it absurd to try to understand political things? Or is it only absurd to try to understand political things without *evaluating* them? A proper discussion would have to go of course into the details.<sup>9</sup> I did this, for example, in the second chapter of my book on natural right,<sup>iii</sup> where I examined the position taken by Max Weber. Now the view of Max Weber is by no means identical with that prevailing at the moment in the social sciences. It’s<sup>10</sup> somewhat older. But one must also say that Max Weber’s whole understanding of the problem was much more profound and reflective than that which is prevalent today. Today the view of so-called relativism in the social sciences is a very simplistic view which is manifestly absurd, namely, that all value judgments express nothing but like or dislike—like preference, mere preference. For example, some people like peaches more than apples, or vice versa, and that is a statement—is said to be the statement of all value judgments. That’s the predominant view. And that is simply not true, as you can see if you look at any assertions you and someone else make about right and wrong, for example: you mean more than [that] you just like it better that way. And this is not even faced by these people. Max Weber did face it.

Now can I perhaps say a word about a recent attempt to defend Max Weber’s position that was done in a French translation of some works of Weber, some collections by Weber, by Raymond Aron in the French translation which came out with Plon. I mention only a few points<sup>11</sup> as a kind of supplement to the earlier remarks I made. Aron grants that it is impossible to speak relevantly about social phenomena without making value judgments. That is a very simple thing: You cannot speak about a given politician or statesman without forming an opinion as to the quality of that politician or statesman, whether he is public-spirited, whether he has<sup>12</sup> a broad perspective or a narrow perspective, and all the other qualities which are relevant. The values belong to the subject matter. Once you abstract from the values, you are no longer speaking about the phenomenon which you claim to analyze. This Aron grants, but what’s the difficulty which he maintains? I read to you: “Max Weber,” Aron says, “might have admitted that [what I have objected with him—LS]. He would have raised objections only in a later phase of the argument. He would have accepted, for example, that one must distinguish between Leonardo da Vinci and his imitators.”<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>iii</sup> *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).

<sup>iv</sup> Raymond Aron, Preface to Max Weber, *Le savant et le politique* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1959), 33. (*Le savant et le politique* is translated into English as “Politics as Vocation.”) Strauss’s translation.

You know what this means. It is a value judgment, that the mere imitator, he does not have the originality, the power of Leonardo da Vinci. It is obvious that you cannot have history of art, sociology of art, or whatever you call [it], without making this distinction. Nor can you have the sociology of knowledge without making [a] distinction between scientific geniuses and people who are not scientific geniuses. That should be clear. Whether a scientific work was epochmaking or merely a kind of textbook formulation of what really original men had found is obviously a factual question of the utmost importance for this kind of thing, a factual question which includes essentially a value judgment. “But,” he goes on to say,

can the historian establish a hierarchy between Persian miniatures and Italian painting, between the statues of Elephanta and the work of Pheidias? Within a universe which possesses its proper criteria of appreciation, the historian cannot but evaluate without fortifying his comprehension of reality. But when the criteria are fundamentally different, when the universes are essentially different, the historian could not appreciate except by taking sides and by this very fact he would cease to be a scholar.<sup>v</sup>

Do you understand this objection? Then let us take another example. I have never heard a speech by Billy Graham, but I believe that most people would say—most Christians surely would say—that however great he may be, Paul, or Pascal, even, are men of a much greater stature. And they would say this not because they like Paul or Pascal better than Billy Graham, but they would show it by reasoning, by arguments. But what if you have to compare Jesus with Buddha? That’s obviously a question of a different order. He means to say if you have a certain, for example, say, Western art, where certain basic intentions remain the same throughout the ages, as he has shown us, then you have an inherent and immanent criterion by which to judge anything occurring within it. But if you have an entirely different kind of art, an entirely different kind of religion, an entirely different kind of society, perhaps, then you cannot judge, say, Western phenomena by Hindu standards, nor Hindu phenomena by Western standards. What do you say about this point?

Well, permit me to read to you something which I have stated in print somewhere, and I couldn’t state it better now: “If we cannot decide which of two mountains whose peaks are hidden by clouds is higher than the other, cannot we decide that a mountain is higher than a molehill?”<sup>vi</sup> For all practical purposes, there *are* value questions which the social scientist cannot settle. We can grant that.<sup>13</sup> I think it is prudent to say that it is beyond the competence of the social scientist, for example, of the sociologist of religion, of the historian of religion, to decide the question as to the respective rank of Christianity and Buddhism. It is prudent to say that. But what follows from that? That he cannot judge at all? That he is not capable to appreciate, for example, Billy Graham, in contradistinction to Calvin? Surely not.<sup>14</sup> There are questions, value questions, just as there are factual questions which are extremely difficult to solve, so much so that one can say for practical purposes they are insoluble. But what follows from that? That social science, the social sciences as such, must abstain from evaluating? Not at all. And the reason is this: there is no clear, universally valid line which can be drawn between the sphere in

<sup>v</sup> Aron, Preface to Max Weber, *Le savant et le politique*, 33.

<sup>vi</sup> Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?” in *What is Political Philosophy? and other studies*. (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 23.

which we can evaluate and in which we cannot evaluate. There are certain very simple things, where every human being, if he is not insane or if he has a minimum of experience, is perfectly competent to judge. Others require a very special competence and a special training. And there may be finally a sphere where hardly any human being can judge. But there is no hard and fast line. And to build the notion of the scope of social science would require either—the other way requires that value judgments are impossible on all levels, which is simply not only not true, but fatal to the idea of social science. There is no difficulty in admitting that there are quite a few value problems which are practically insoluble, and insisting on the necessity of judging in terms of values where everyone is competent to judge.

I remember when I began my teaching in Chicago, I had a long drawn-out fight with one student—he's now a member of the political science profession—who absolutely refused to admit that the distinction between art and trash can be used by a social scientist. Now if that is so, I contend then that such a notion as sociology of art, or history of art, doesn't make any sense.<sup>15</sup> Or for that matter, history of literature. If anyone writes a poem in the *Sun Times* of Chicago, then he's a poet. But I think quite a few among us are in a position to say, with all due respect to this gentleman, that this is perhaps rhyme but not a poem—and that is not merely an impression, but that we could quote chapter and verse for proving it.

So the second point which comes out in the connection is this. Weber's argument can be stated as follows: the objectivity of the social sciences requires the exclusion of value judgments. I contend that there is no objective science possible if there is no possibility of objective value judgments. Now, how did Weber try to solve the problem in particular? Weber admitted that any social science requires criteria of relevance. A social scientist doesn't study all facts, but relevant facts. What is relevant and what is not is established only by reference to values. These values were according to him fundamentally subjective values. But, he said,<sup>16</sup> this does not affect the objectivity of social science for the following reason. Science is a body of true propositions, of the answers to questions that can be established by ordinary rules; whether the answer is true or not can be established by reference to the rules of evidence or of proof. Weber admitted that the questions which the social scientist addresses to the phenomena are not objective. They are due to his direction of interest and therefore ultimately to the value system which he adopts. So<sup>17</sup> the enterprise as a whole consists of this: an inevitably subjective part—the questions—and an objective part—the answers.

But there is this difficulty. The questions, and especially the broad questions, supply the theoretical framework, the fundamental concepts; the answers,<sup>18</sup> however separated they may be from certain specific questions,<sup>19</sup> are not separable from the concepts because the answers are necessarily couched in terms of the concepts. In other words, if Weber is right that there are no objective values, then there cannot be an objective social science. The consequence is that, as I stated in my criticism, the social science as Weber conceives of it is necessarily a parochial affair. The values of a given social scientist—and that means, in practice, of his society, of his age—determine the conceptual framework of the science, and a universally valid social science is impossible from this point of view.

I discussed one example, mentioned one example. Weber's social or political doctrine is concerned with what he calls the three forms of legitimacy, three principles of legitimacy:

traditional, rational, and charismatic.<sup>vii</sup> The traditional, as Weber would tell you, would be the situation, say, in a medieval society, or in a central African tribe, or what have you. Rational, that is what is characteristic of the modern constitutional liberal state. Charismatic would be something where—like Hitler—where the personal gifts of the ruler are *the* legitimation of the rule. I contended in my criticism<sup>20</sup> that this is a distinction which cannot possibly lay claim to any universality because it is simply borrowed from the situation in the western European countries in the nineteenth century, insofar as there was this great struggle between the relics of the ancient regime and the modern revolutionary movements stemming from the French Revolution.<sup>viii</sup> In this context, the opposition of tradition and reason made some sense because the ancient regime *claimed*—based its authority, in a way, on age-old tradition, on prescription. The modern regimes which emerged<sup>21</sup> [from the] French Revolution [in opposition to the *ancien régime*] *claimed* to be based on reason. And with a view to experiences like that of Napoleon I, Weber added a third one with the charismatic: a kind of rulership which was neither that of the ancient regime nor that of the modern constitutional state.

Now Aron makes this remark on the subject. I will leave it at that. “The three terms—tradition, reason, charisma—correspond to<sup>22</sup> [three] principles of obedience. Man obeys chiefs whom tradition consecrates, whom reason designates, whom enthusiasm elevates above the others.”<sup>ix</sup> That’s his justification. In other words, he claims that this distinction is one which is really based on the nature of man, on the nature of the ruler-ruled relationship. But I ask you, what does that mean? He obeys chiefs whom reason designates. Is President Eisenhower, or Adenauer, Chancellor Adenauer of Germany, or whoever [it] may be, or Macmillan: are they designated by reason? What does this mean? What does this mean? They’ve been elected in a legal manner, but what has this to do with reason? Well, if you make all kinds of unclear assumptions, you can perhaps justify in a roundabout way that it, the word “reason,” could make sense after all. But primarily, it doesn’t make any sense. It makes sense if you take into consideration this conflict between tradition and reason from the nineteenth century. It is not in itself a meaningful distinction.

The main point which I made Aron does not even discuss, namely, that the Weberian distinction between reason, tradition, and charismatic is ultimately based on the view that people’s most human, most profound [truth] is charismatic truth. Without this value judgment, concealed but discoverable, the whole distinction would not make sense.<sup>23</sup> I know this word “charismatic” is constantly used in a certain kind of popular sociological literature, but these terms do not stand up under any analysis, especially the Weberian form where it does not make any difference whether the so-called charismatic ruler is a fellow like Hitler or an inspired statesman like Churchill. They are both charismatic; what’s the difference? There is obviously a difference. That the one works in a constitutional framework and the other does not is true, but not so simply, because whether Hitler’s government, at least in the first stages, was not perfectly legal according to the prescriptions of the Weimar Constitution is, as you know, a very complicated question. Or if you take the other case, of Lincoln, who surely was an inspired ruler but whose rule was not in every respect constitutional according to the then-understanding of the American

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<sup>vii</sup> *Natural Right and History*, 55-57. See Weber’s *The Three Types of Legitimate Rule*, as well as *Politics as a Vocation*.

<sup>viii</sup> *Natural Right and History*, 57.

<sup>ix</sup> Aron, 37. Strauss’s translation.

Constitution, then you see the difficulty. It has a certain plausibility for the Western world in the nineteenth century. Aron seems to admit everything I said by saying at the end: “The Weberian scheme helps for seizing the core of the political problem of *our* civilization.”<sup>x</sup> But Weber wanted to use it for the understanding of *all* civilizations; therefore he in fact admits my suggestion that this is a merely parochial scheme.

There is perhaps one more point which I could mention. Yes, well, let’s look first at the<sup>24</sup> main point which I made, that the Weberian position strictly leads to nihilism, which Aron, with some hemming and hawing, grants. It would take us too long to discuss that.

Now I will come back to the point from which I started. Perhaps what is wrong is *not* the belief in reason but a certain understanding of reason, the modern understanding. But even if this is not so, we must try at any rate to understand our dilemma, and our dilemma is surely due to the failure of modern rationalism. Modern rationalism is in itself a transformation of classical rationalism. Modern rationalism is necessarily a derivative phenomenon which we cannot understand except by going back to the original.

I will illustrate this by one example. When Hobbes, who in a way is the originator of modern social science, of modern rationalism, began his argument, he says the following thing:

When I turned my thoughts to the inquiry of natural justice, I was admonished by the very name, “justice,”<sup>25</sup> (by which one understands a constant will, to attribute to everyone his right). I was admonished by this very name that one must seek first how it comes that someone can call something *his* rather than another man’s. Now, since it is an established fact that this distinction is not by nature [meaning that I own this cigarette not by nature—LS] but through the agreement of men, for nature has given everything to all and men have divided it afterward, I was therefore led to another question, namely, for whose benefit, or by virtue of which necessity, men wished rather to divide up things so that there would be property, than to leave them in composition.<sup>xi</sup>

Now what does this mean? Hobbes begins his inquiry by starting from the definition of justice. Justice is the constant will to give, to assign to everyone what belongs to him. How does he know that this is justice? What do Plato and Aristotle [say] in regard to this question? We have the *Republic*, Plato’s *Republic*; we have Aristotle’s *Ethics*. There justice is treated. What do they do? They *seek* a definition of justice. They seek, they start in a much more elementary way and arrive at a certain definition of justice which is much more rich, much more articulate than what Hobbes says about it. Hobbes does no longer see any question. Everyone knows what justice is. Someone has to find it, that’s clear. And on this basis then he raises the question which could not possibly take on the basic importance it has for Hobbes<sup>26</sup> if what justice is were a problem. Now this is only one example, but I think it is a typical example, that modern thought somehow

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<sup>x</sup> Aron 38. Strauss’s translation.

<sup>xi</sup> From the Epistle Dedicatory of Hobbes’s *De Cive*. Strauss most likely uses Molesworth’s Latin edition here, providing his own translation. Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive, Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis opera philosophica quae latine scripsit omnia: in unum corpus nunc primum collecta studio et labore*, vol. 2, ed. Gulielmi Molesworth (Londini: Joannem Bohn, 1839-1845), 138-39.

assumes that certain basic and therefore inconspicuous questions have been settled by the tradition and they can then begin therefore on a higher level.

To take the most simple example but at the same time the most profound, these people who revolted against Aristotle and Plato and so on in the seventeenth century, the sixteenth century, they said then: So that's all wrong. Their results are wrong. They did not have the right method and so on and so on. But one thing was no longer a question for them: the possibility and the necessity of a political science or social science. This was taken for granted. The question was only in what way to proceed. But is there not a grave assumption implied in the very belief in the possibility and necessity of social science, or of science in general? This *truly* fundamental question was the primary scene of the classical thinkers. In this respect as well as in others, modern thought is *derivative*. It transforms the preceding science. It transforms it, but in the act of transformation it presupposes it. Therefore one cannot understand this modern stratum without having understood that through transformation of which it originally emerged. Therefore it is necessary: if we want to understand the problem with which we are confronted, which is primarily created by modern science, both natural and social, we have to go back to the origins, and these origins are to be found in Greece. Especially as far as social problems are concerned,<sup>27</sup> we have to go back to Socrates, and that we wish to do.

Before we turn to the texts, I would like to make only one remark with which I began last time, but I will limit myself to one aspect of this only. Quite externally, Socrates never wrote. What Socratic political philosophy is we know only from pupils of Socrates. Plato and Xenophon. But to speak here now only of Plato, who is the much greater man, Plato on the other hand disappears behind his Socrates. Socrates never wrote. Plato, we may say with a slight exaggeration, never wrote except in the name of Socrates. That creates a certain difficulty in itself. What is behind that? What does this mean? The problem of political philosophy as the classics understood it is that of the best social order, the best political order, the best regime. And this is fundamentally the problem of the best life, the best way of life. We can say the best way of life of the individual is the core of the best regime as Plato and Aristotle understood that. This teaching regarding the best regime or the best way of life is transmitted by Plato not in the form of a treatise, as Aristotle did it in his *Ethics* and *Politics*, but in the form of dialogues. And in a way, the problem of Plato's political philosophy is *identical* with the question of why Plato wrote in dialogues about it. Apparently we cannot understand what the best regime or the best way of life is if we do not understand it through dialogues, whatever that may mean.

I would like to bring up only one point. The best way of life—the best way of life: that is something which is meant to apply, if in somewhat different ways, to all men. It is a *universal*. Any way of life, of good life presented in a dialogue, as Socrates's life is presented in Plato's dialogues, is not *the* best way of life but the best way of life *as lived* by an individual, Socrates, with these and these accidental qualities. The best way of life as stated, say, by Aristotle would be stated only with a view to what is essentially necessary. No accidents, like “born in Athens,” “snub-nosed,” and “can drink more than anyone else,” and the other things we learn about Socrates would enter here. Whenever an individual is represented, as Socrates, as leading *the* perfect life, accident and chance necessarily enter. And that seems to be, in other words, an inferior form of presentation.

But there is another way of looking at it. The best way of life as described, say, in Aristotle's *Ethics* presents an "ought": this is the way in which men *ought* to live, in which men *should* live. The presentation<sup>28</sup> of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues shows the best way as actually lived, the best way of life as actually lived: not merely the ought but the act, the deed, the compliance; not the mere prescription, but the execution. This excess of the execution, of the act, beyond the prescription seems to convey a lesson which the prescription does not convey. One thing is clear. The prescription can never say that any man actually lived up to that. The description shows an example, but that surely does not go to the root of the matter.

One point can be stated generally, if not clearly, but that must be said: the best way of life is surely a life which is actually lived. If it is merely prescribed and demanded, it is not actually lived. There is something beyond the prescription, beyond the *logos*, which is in a way the most important thing. The mere prescription, the mere *logos*, is up in the air; it must be executed, it must be fulfilled. I appeal to an experience which you all must have made. We hear all kinds of universal statements: prescriptions, demands, commands. In a way, these universal statements become intelligible only by application. What we understand before we have tried to apply them is not yet an understanding. For example, if someone recommends [to] us self-control in a certain situation which we have never been in, and that is in a way a very empty thing; but once we have been such a situation and we have seen how difficult it is to exercise self-control there, then we understand what it means. Theoretically,<sup>29</sup> we can perhaps not say more than we said before, but there is something there, very important and very powerful, which we understand now and which we did not understand before. The question is whether that excess stemming from lived experience can find its full expression in speech, in *logos*, unless one uses such devices as, for example, a dialogue or, for that matter, poetry. In a way, it is a very common thing, when you read a book dealing with human conduct and the man never uses an example, never an illustration, then strictly speaking it is unintelligible. I mentioned this once with John Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*, which is not disfigured by a single example, and so you hear all these nice things about the relation of impulse and custom, and how to strike a balance between the two in the proper act; and, as you say, you cannot be sure whether you understood Dewey because he never gives an example. Naturally,<sup>30</sup> if you want to try to understand it, you must find examples for yourself, but you can never be sure whether they would be the examples which Dewey would have in mind. Universal rules become intelligible only by being seen in particular cases. The individual case, say, Socrates, concedes the universal, in a way, because there is always—Socrates may be—someone else in another situation would act entirely differently, would understand entirely differently, perhaps. That is true. To turn to the principle, accident always enters whenever you present an individual case. But it is equally important to realize that the individual case also reveals the universal; as universal, it is never revealed in its meaning. That is one of the reasons why Plato, in presenting the best life, presents it in the form of what we can call a *description* and not in the form of mere prescriptions.

Plato's work as a whole is nothing but a presentation of the wise man. The theoretical discussions, for example, about the best regime, the best life, virtue, justice, and so on are all parts of that description or presentation. Or, to use terms somewhat closer to Plato's own usage, Plato imitates in his dialogues the life of a wise man. Of course he imitates the wise man in action as a wise man—he does not tell us how Socrates behaved when he was dressing or undressing because there is nothing wise about that—and the chief activity of the wise man



being speaking, he presents him of course almost exclusively in the act of speaking. I say “almost exclusively” because Socrates is also presented as dying, as you know, which seems to be a more appropriate way of showing wisdom in action than Socrates getting married, for example, which Plato never presented.

Now this constitutes the uniqueness of Plato’s work. There is no other describer or imitator who did nothing but imitate the wise life, the life of the wise man in the action of wisdom. A few Greek examples: Homer’s Odysseus is not *the* wise man. Odysseus lacks Homer’s wisdom. In Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, we do find the self-presentation of a wise man—I mean of Hesiod, the poet himself. Side by side with this work, there is Hesiod’s *Theogony*, which has no important connection with the self-representation of the wise man. Parmenides, in his poem, presents a wise man, himself, mythically, namely, in the act of receiving the truth from the goddess. His *life* is not presented at all. And I think if you will look at modern presentations, or medieval presentations, for that matter, the examples will, to say the least, be very rare of a man who devoted his whole life to the presentation of the act of the life of wisdom. Do you know any examples? Don’t say Shakespeare, because I think of Shakespeare in this connection. *Tempest* is such a presentation, Prospero; but that is one of many plays, it is not the sole theme. So I wonder whether you know of a single man at any time, apart from Plato, whose whole theme was the presentation, the imitation of the good life, because that means for Plato the life of the wise man: the good life in deed. Still, although Plato’s work is without precedent, he could use earlier presentations of wise men and surely did. He could even have had the good fortune of having a presentation of *his* wise man at his disposal. And what is that presentation of *his* wise man, which Plato could use? Pardon?

**Mr. Metzel:** Socrates.

**LS:** No, no, not a presentation.

**Mr. Metzel:** Oh, sure.

**LS:** It slipped. There was already a presentation of Socrates before him which he could use.

**Mr. Metzel:** The *Clouds*.

**LS:** The *Clouds*. I think we turn now to the *Clouds*.<sup>31</sup> But before I turn to that I would like to know whether any of these very broad points to which I have referred call for further clarification. I mean, I know that they call for them, but I must make this dependent upon your desires, for reasons which you will understand, if you don’t understand them now, as soon as you have begun to teach.<sup>xii</sup>

What I tried to make clear to you was this: that we are confronted with very serious difficulties which make it advisable, if not necessary, to return to the origins of our way of thinking, and that means for all practical purposes to Socrates. Once this is admitted,<sup>32</sup> we are confronted immediately with this great difficulty, that Socrates did not write; and therefore we have to go on to the question as to *why* Socrates did not write, or in different ways, why Plato wrote only in the

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<sup>xii</sup> It is possible that there was a break in the tape at this point.

form of a presentation of the life of a wise man as distinguished from such presentation as you have in Aristotle and in all later philosophers. Mr. Cohen?

**Student:** You spoke of the possibility that reason would be considered to be a delusion—

**LS:** Yes.

**Same Student:** and I can perhaps understand what that means in modern terms—

**LS:** Yes.

**Same Student:** Say, in Kant, for example. He would—

**LS:** Yes, you go very high. But why go to Kant? I can give you a much simpler example taken from our problems here, from our Division,<sup>xiii</sup> I should rightly say. Did you ever hear of ideologies? What is ideology except an irrational speech, highly esteemed by the people affected by it? . . . For example, the view which is very common, of course, and that exists, and you must have heard it *n* times: there cannot be a rational doctrine of the purpose of civil society. On the other hand, people cannot live without having *opinions* about the purpose of their society. Ya? You know? These opinions are now called ideologies.<sup>33</sup> This implies of course reason, namely, that there could be a true, rational view of the purpose of the civil society is impossible. We have to be satisfied with irrationalities of social value . . . The question of course arises:<sup>34</sup> Is it not reason which establishes the social value?<sup>35</sup> Yes? Which raises certain difficulties. Ya? But let us—

**Same Student:** But does ideology in this view imply that a rational account of the purpose of society is impossible?

**LS:** Yes, sure. Because otherwise you would say that, for example, if you take the Marxist view, because it is Marx who made the notion “ideology” as popular as it is today.<sup>36</sup> You know that it was not coined by Marx; it was coined by Napoleon, the term “ideology.”<sup>xiv</sup>

**Student:** . . . .

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** The people who hold the Marxist view don’t think the Marxist view is really ideology.

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<sup>xiii</sup> Presumably the Social Science Division at the University of Chicago.

<sup>xiv</sup> See, e.g., Louis de Villefoss and Janine Bouissounouse, *The Scourge of the Eagle: Napoleon and the Liberal Opposition*, trans. Michael Ross (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972), 132. Within several years the term had crossed the Atlantic; see the entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol.1, 1368: 1813. J. Adams, wrks (1856) X. 52. “Napoleon has lately invented a word, which perfectly expressed my opinion. He calls the project ideology.”

**LS:** Of course not. They are still old-fashioned. Therefore a Marxist wrote a book a few years ago, a German Marxist,<sup>37</sup> the only educated Marxist in the Western world: Georg Lukács. He is a Hungarian. His books are not translated into English [LS writes on the blackboard] and he really—I mean, he is worth reading. He’s a much deeper thinker than the late, lamented Stalin, to say nothing of Khrushchev. So I mean if you want to know what Marxism could mean theoretically, one wants to read that. I don’t believe it establishes the truth of Marxism in any way, but one should know that. Now <sup>38</sup>Lukács wrote a book a few years ago in German called the *Destruction of Reason*,<sup>xv</sup> by which he meant the destruction of reasoning<sup>xvi</sup>—but even the less advanced stage of it.

**Same Student:** Well, I wanted to—

**LS:** Surely they would say they had the scientific account. Sure, that’s what dialectical materialism means; and therefore anything we think, anything we think is ideology. What happened then was that a certain half-Marxist called Mannheim, partly following Lukács, said *all* social thought, including Marxism, is ideological.<sup>xvii</sup> In other words, in the form of Lukács himself, which shows his cleverness and at the same time something else, Lukács said forty years ago: Marxism must be applied to itself.<sup>xviii</sup> But surely, if you apply Marxism to itself in this way it will reveal itself as ideology, and that is today the common view. All . . . have an ideology, and they have an ideology, the Marxists have an ideology, some tribe in Central Africa has an ideology, and man is an ideological animal—every man. That is today the very common view. So I mean, there are some people who use slightly different expressions; for example, they say every society must have a myth, but that amounts to the same thing, as the very word indicates.

**Same Student:** Well, when I read Plato, I don’t find this possibility entertained at all, that reason—the possibility that reason is a delusion.

**LS:** That reason is a delusion? No. That must be forgiven, what I was saying. I said there is a modern possibility that reason is a delusion. Then we must try to live with positivism. Or if this is really, truly, impossible, we must find our way somehow with existentialism or something of this kind. But if reason is not a delusion, we really have to go back to those men who stood for reason, to put it very simply. And the greatest name, as far as the study of human things, surely, is concerned, is Socrates, or if you wish, Plato. That is what I said.

**Same Student:** I’ve heard it expressed that this is a Socratic or Platonic phase in Greece. Is—

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<sup>xv</sup> The edition to which Strauss refers is probably Georg Lukács, *Der Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1953).

<sup>xvi</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

<sup>xvii</sup> Strauss refers here to the work of the Hungarian Marxist (and fellow exile) Karl Mannheim. For his views on ideology, see Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (Bonn: F. Cohen, 1929). [*Ideology and Utopia* (1936)]

<sup>xviii</sup> It is likely that Strauss refers here to, and possibly even paraphrases, Lukács’s Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*. See (in the edition available to Strauss) Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein: Studien über Marxistische Dialektik* (Berlin: Der-Malik Verlag, 1923), 7.

**LS:** Yes, it is a question. Is it a mere phase? If it is a mere phase, then it would be also some ideology. That is of course what people say, that<sup>39</sup> the Platonic philosophy is one particular expression of the Greek way of looking at things. That means of course it is not intrinsically true; it only has a certain evidence for the Greeks. For us, other things are evident, but not because they're intrinsically evident but because we are modern men for whom certain modern notions have evidence. What is at the bottom of your difficulty?

**Same Student:** <sup>40</sup>Well, at the bottom is the question whether the possibility of knowledge is simply an assumption that you have to begin with.

**LS:** Yes. It's a question. But whether it is such a deep question, such a difficult question, is another matter.

**Same Student:** But it's only at a certain point, it seems, that people come to question if not the possibility, then certainly the . . . of knowledge.

**LS:** You see, the problem is this.<sup>41</sup> So that the question is serious, there must be grounds for the question. For example, if I question that this is a shawl or a scarf, that is a silly question, I believe. Yes, unless—or is my example is bad? It is really a scarf. [Laughter] So it is a silly question. It is a silly question. But under certain conditions it can very well be a legitimate question, because, for example, it's dark and I touch something and I don't know what it is. So the question "Is knowledge possible?"—"Is knowledge possible?"—needs some grounds. After all, when I say, "I know you, Mr. Cohen," that does not mean that I must have a complete understanding of your "quote personality unquote," but simply I can distinguish you from any other students around here and probably recognize you in a crowd of a hundred thousand men. Then if someone says, "I can't," I simply say, "Well, you apparently have a very poor memory or so that you can't remember people after they've seen you at some point." There must be grounds for that. As a matter of fact, that was the way in which it came about. For example, if you read Descartes's *First Meditation*—one must doubt of everything—Descartes gives some reasons why one should doubt. Whether the reasons are good or not is another matter, but he at least fulfils the minimum requirement of trying to give some.<sup>42</sup> Of course, the question of whether knowledge in a very general way is possible is not sufficient, because the question concerns knowledge of good and bad, which is a more specific question. And<sup>43</sup> we have to face that, by all means, when we come to Socrates.

There was another point in your remark which may give me an occasion to restate what I was trying to say . . . today there is a popular view in the social sciences: there are only ideologies; there is a democratic ideology, and there is a communist ideology, a fascist [ideology], the *ancien regime*, and [an ideology] of any tribe. What does social science do? Social science recognizes the *need* for such ideologies. Yes? And that would probably be given in the form of the need for "rationalizations." People live in a certain manner for economic or<sup>44</sup> climatic or whatever reasons, but men are such strange creatures that they need to believe that there are reasons for that, good reasons, and that's a rationalization. We don't believe in any of these ideologies as social scientists; we describe them, and we understand them in their relation to the actions and life of these people. Is this not what the social scientist, as ordinarily understood, does? The question is whether that is possible. That is my dilemma: whether that is possible,

whether this so-called impartial and objective stratagem of ideologies in their relations to institutions is not ultimately based on some commitment—on some values, as people say. That is the problem.<sup>45</sup> And whether—for example, can you study, even if you leave it at the word “ideology,” can you study ideologies without making a distinction between crude and sophisticated ideologies, narrow and broad, and so on? . . .

**Student:** In your discussion of Max Weber, I got the impression you were suggesting that even these values which the social scientist must assume are themselves—can be shown to be only parochial under the same principles.

**LS:** These [are] unreflected values, obviously. If someone [who] denies the possibility of value judgment cannot help letting them in by a back door, then he surely hasn’t thought about them. And then<sup>46</sup> there is almost certainly something wrong about them. And let us take<sup>47</sup> again the most crude and simple example. Our social science has a kind of, partly a basis and partly an . . . which is psychopathology. The social scientist cannot help speaking of adjusted or maladjusted people or some such thing. And then, whether he says these are<sup>48</sup> value judgments or not—these are merely descriptive things without any value judgment—that does not make any impression because in fact they are value judgments. But<sup>49</sup> if you leave it at the distinction between adjusted and maladjusted, you take an extremely narrow view of man, as if—I can only repeat myself—a slick operator may be adjusted, well-adjusted in terms of this distinction, and a very nice and thoughtful man may be maladjusted in the psychological sense. A man who was at odds with the Nazi regime, or is at odds with the communist regime, like Pasternak,<sup>xix</sup> for example, is in a sense surely maladjusted. One can say that it is necessary to be maladjusted to a bad society, and being adjusted at all costs is a very silly and narrow notion of what is really important. So you have here in fact a value scheme, but a particularly narrow and poor value scheme. Without it you cannot do anything.

**Same Student:** Then, jumping to the distinction between Jesus and Buddha, were you saying that there is no basis, at least—

**LS:** Ya.<sup>50</sup> You see, I must now use—for convenience sake, I must now use the language of our times, the common language. In both cases, what is called religious experience—place, culture—without religious experience and a very deep religious experience, the student is completely incompetent to say anything. And who could claim to such deep experiences here? <sup>51</sup>So it is simply prudent and practical to say that it’s impossible to judge. Of course there are connections; there are connections between what is said on the basis of religious experience with other things, with things which one can see even without religious experience and understand without them. I don’t say that there is no possibility of criticism, but surely it is an extremely irresponsible and difficult thing; and for practical purposes,<sup>52</sup> if a student would come to me and say, “I want to write a critical evaluation of Buddhism,” I would say, “I don’t think that’s a good idea.” And I would say it also to quite a few professors. That is what I meant by practical.<sup>53</sup> Now is there any other point? You.

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<sup>xix</sup> Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), Russian poet, writer and translator, escaped Stalin’s purges. Publication of his novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, completed in 1956, was denied by the Soviets because it contained criticism of Stalin’s policies and the Gulag. Published first in Italy, the book became a “sensation” and was aggressively denounced by the Soviets. Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1958.

**Mr. Haight:** Yes, I'd like to raise sort of a practical—

**LS:** You are Mr. Haight, yes?

**Mr. Haight:** That's right. I'd like to raise sort of a practical question about value judgments in the social sciences. You said that while we can't, say, compare Jesus and Buddha, it is still possible to compare Calvin and Billy Graham,<sup>xx</sup> for example, and this kind of value judgment we can certainly use. There's a problem, it seems to me, about the point at which you decide that you want to leave the comparison alone because you're not good enough to handle it, because the more major the comparison you want to make is, the more important the things are that you're trying to compare, the more serious your mistake will be if you make a mistake. If you're writing the sociological history of religion and you make a mistake comparing Calvin and Billy Graham, well, this will confuse a relatively minor area of your book, but if you make a mistake comparing Jesus and Buddha, this will confuse a great deal and ruin your whole book, probably. How do you decide at what point you'd better stop making value judgments?

**LS:** Well, I think, you know, that's a hard question, because it sins; the question sins because of its generality. You know—

**Mr. Haight:** It's a general question, yes.

**LS:** Yes, in all interesting questions of this kind, that they must be brought down, must be said in concrete terms. You see? And I said in my exposition that I do not believe that in any practical, useful way you can draw a line.<sup>54</sup> Leaving it on the level on which it was stated, I would say that as far as I know—and this is a qualification—there is no man who is competent to judge, in terms of evaluating, of everything. There will always be a limit. At least all human beings I have ever seen, however gifted and broad, had their limits. If they were men of levity, they would judge regardless. You know that. I think that Lord Bertrand Russell,<sup>xxi</sup> whom I have never seen, would perhaps be a well-known example of someone who judges regardless. But if they are sensible, they usually don't go beyond that. They don't go beyond their limitations. And they have likes, and conversationally and jocularly one may say all kinds of things which one cannot support, surely. But when one speaks seriously, and I believe to speak in print should really mean to speak seriously, one should not go beyond that point of what one knows and what one could support. The easy relativism which prevails and which, for example, says since all new fashions in paintings were greeted with derision and hundreds of years later people paid a hundred thousand dollars for a painting which was worth fifty cents at the time, doesn't prove anything at all; it merely proves that it takes some time until a really *original* thought, an original conception, finds a hearing.<sup>55</sup> That doesn't mean of course that all original thoughts (you say, "How original!"), which are much rarer than you think, are good. That is not the question. Perhaps one cannot decide.

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<sup>xx</sup> Billy Graham (1918-2018), American evangelist.

<sup>xxi</sup> Bertrand Russell, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Russell (1903-1970), author of numerous works on philosophy, mathematics, politics, science, and general essays. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950.

There is a very simple example apart from this fact of so-called historical change. There are quite a few things which we experience in our lives where a long familiarity was required before one could appreciate them. There are things which impress us immediately, but there are other things which may not impress us immediately, and only by some back doors we enter by some accident, and then we gradually begin to appreciate the unpromising façade. That could be. It's very complicated, very complicated. And frequently we hear [that] one must be careful in judging, but instead of judging you are forced to gather facts. For example, look at a sphere in which the distinction between fact and value judgment simply does not come up. When we read a passage in Plato we are concerned with the fact: What did this speaker mean here? And we are not concerned with whether what he says is true or not, or truthfully expressed or not. But is it not as difficult to get the truth about the fact, What did he mean? I mean, certain factual statements are extremely simple to make. For example: How many people are in this room? A simple counting will do. But there are also value judgments which are extremely simple to make. For example, it would be thinkable that a human being, male or female, of quite outstanding beauty were among us (I mean, maybe there is one; I don't want to go into this), where all would somehow say: Of course. Also very simple. Or that someone is particularly quick or clever, or particularly nice and so, can be as simple as counting. But a mere counting of course is surely a very simple mental operation, you know, although not all human beings have this persistence.

Your question is an inevitable question, but it is unanswerable because of its generality. It's not sufficiently defined. It permits therefore only of a universal answer, just as if someone would say: How should one live? One can only say: Decently. It becomes meaningful only in application. In generality, you cannot say more, but you can perhaps tell a bit more than decently. You can say [that] decency can show itself in relation to others, in the way in which he treats himself, and so on. You know? That can be done. But still it is not as illuminating as someone knowing this individual with his problems, or this individual perhaps himself tries to spell out for himself: What does it mean live decently for me? Circumstances are handled in this way. Yes?

**Mr. Haight:** Two things. First, a short defense of my question, in that it's a general question because it was directed to your statement which was a general statement. And secondly, the example you gave: you quoted from your book on distinguishing between a mountain and a molehill?<sup>xxii</sup>

**LS:** Ya.

**Mr. Haight:** I think I understand this, but it's a little bit confusing. It's possible to make distinctions between a mountain and a molehill, or Jesus and Billy Graham, but does this mean that value judgments are possible so long as you're not dealing with extremely large or important subjects, or does it mean that you have to be careful to make only gross distinctions? That is a possible inference from your example, I think, that it would be possible to distinguish between Billy Graham and Billy Sunday,<sup>xxiii</sup> or between two molehills. Did you mean that? I don't think you did.

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<sup>xxii</sup> *WIPP?*, 23.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Billy Sunday (1862-1935), American evangelist.

**LS:** <sup>56</sup>I know much too little about Billy Sunday to say anything about this man, but if he is . . . So forget about this example, that I might seem to be unfair to anyone. But taking my simple one, where there are two molehills, whether one is higher than the other could of course be sometimes very difficult to say. Surely—I mean, if they are almost the same height, surely.<sup>57</sup> But the practical point is if you<sup>58</sup> consider [that] the meaning of the comparison is whether<sup>59</sup> we are capable to distinguish between mountains and molehills morally speaking, in terms of evaluating, that's the thing which counts. And relativism as practiced today induces one to forget this big book for all the print. That's really what I was saying. Any more . . .

**Student:** Need you to go so far as to say anything about the comparative greatness of, say, Billy Graham and Jesus in order to achieve considerable understanding of them? Because can't you compare them in certain respects and try to understand their particular approaches, but given—

**LS:** Sure you can. The question is: Why do you want to do that? Do you simply keep back for yourself something which occurred to you while going over the evidence? That can be done for various reasons, for reasons of very gross prudence: you don't want to hurt another human being; or it can be done for other reasons of propriety, but that is another matter. Propriety may put, impose on us all kinds of reticence. But the main point is that I do not believe that you can go into such a subject with understanding without forming a judgment which is necessarily a value judgment.

**Same Student:** Well, if you don't compare them, say, and just want to try to understand Jesus or whoever you wish to take and try to relive the experience you have of whatever is involved, then need you make, then can't you describe—

**LS:** Yes, sure, you can, but then you simply say for certain reasons you keep back what you couldn't have observed. But it is there. After all, the value judgments are not identical with written statements or publicly-made statements. I think that's impossible, to go into any such matter without “forming—with some depth—without at least—you see, you must also not forget this,<sup>60</sup> which is particularly important in the context of distinction. You compare two human phenomena, say, two very important individuals, and you come up with the view both are very great. Ya? Say, a tragedy by Sophocles and a comedy by Shakespeare. And if you are asked which do you prefer—I mean, not merely from the point of view of your personal likes of each<sup>61</sup>—you will insist that you can't do that: Shakespeare's comedy has these and these high qualities; Sophocles's tragedy has these and these high qualities; and there is no possibility of weighing the strength of qualities AB [LS writes on the blackboard] and the qualities CD. I don't see any difficulty in that. I mean, value judgment does not mean that we must always say A is superior to B. It can very well be that A is equal to B, but for different reasons. But the value judgment consists in the fact that you say they are both great works of art. That's a value judgment.

Also in more narrowly moral matters, matters<sup>62</sup> which concern human conduct, there may very well be the case that two courses of action which are mutually exclusive can each be recommended as strongly as the other on serious grounds, and so that you can, well, ultimately do something which is an equivalent to tossing a coin. Why could this be impossible? There's a beautiful statement of this problem by Hume both in his *History of England* and his *Treatise of*



*Human Nature* about the War of the Roses. Two parties, York and Lancaster, and he states with great rhetorical skill that the case for both parties was equally good. It could exist. Why not? And so the decision that a man took at that time depended on to which family he belonged or on other accidental things, but a legal or even moral superiority could not be established. Why should this not exist? Why should this not be possible? But this does not mean that value judgments are impossible, because the whole argument is based on value judgments in every point: I mean, these are the good sides of the York, these are the good sides of the Lancasters; these are the bad sides of York and the bad sides of Lancasters. But the overall picture is so regarded as a mixture of good and evil, of course, so that you cannot say one is better than the other: I don't see the difference. Those who, like me, deny the impossibility of getting along in the social sciences without value judgments do not mean that one possesses a kind of handbook of prescriptions in which he can look up perfectly demonstrative solutions to all human problems. That surely doesn't exist. The question is only whether the alternative view, the absurd one which says we cannot make *any* preference *anywhere* which is not merely subjective, [is correct]. That seems to me completely absurd. But that there are questions which cannot be settled does not refute the position . . . I would say it even confirms it, because the difficulty arises on the basis of evaluating. Hume's statement I recommend to you. You will find it in the *History of England* at the proper place, and in the *Treatise of Human Nature* in the discussion of justice.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Yes. Well,<sup>63</sup> to come back now to . . . next time we will hear the report of Mr. Metzel on Aristophanes's *Clouds*, and we will have here an interesting example from the beginning, even if we look only at the surface: a scientist who denies morality, who denies that morality is true. And he comes in conflict with the citizens who know from experience, from experience which the scientist lacks, that this is not so, that to teach people to beat up their parents if the parents don't behave, that this is very bad. Very bad, because it destroys all of the household, it destroys the possibility of bringing up children, and that is bad because man is a being which has first to be a child before it can be grown up, and therefore there is the necessity of paternal authority. You can develop without this, but that is merely a rational reaction. And I think we should, before we go into the deeper stratum of the problem, pay some attention to this very<sup>64</sup> simple and superficial point of view. There is a certain similarity—not identity, but a certain similarity—between the problem posed by the Socrates of Aristophanes and the problem we have today: a science which is, to say the least, no support for morality. And I think some of our members would say Aristophanes presents a kind of McCarthy reaction<sup>xxv</sup> to this extremely academic man. He goes even beyond anything Senator McCarthy ever proposed. He burns down the academy—not only books, but everything. So that is not, even on its surface,<sup>65</sup> a subject which has not a message, a meaning for us today.<sup>xxvi</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted “and its—.”

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<sup>xxiv</sup> Cf. *History of England*, chap. 21ff. To what section of the *Treatise of Human Nature* Strauss refers is unknown.

<sup>xxv</sup> Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957), U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, claimed in 1950 that 205 people who worked for the U.S. State Department were members of the American Communist Party. The charge led to broad Senate investigations of American citizens and ultimately to the military. Reaction against the investigation into the U.S. Army brought about McCarthy's downfall.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Strauss concludes the session with remarks about students' papers. These remarks have been deleted.

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<sup>2</sup> Deleted “known as a sphere of common sense—.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “This is—.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “say—.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “there is not so that.”

<sup>6</sup> Changed from “science is by its nature capable only in a—would become complete only in

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “is—.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “if the status of—.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “The most—.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “a very—.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “for those who—.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “breadth of—.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “It is—.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “What follows—.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “With what right—.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “this does not affect—.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “you have, then—.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “whatever—.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “they.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “that this is a purely—.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted: “In opposition to the French Revolution.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted: “two.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “And I think that every attempt—.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “—my.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “(according to which,,”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “if it were so—.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “the problem is—.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “in a Platonic dialogue, by—of the—.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “we are, perhaps,,”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “you must—.”

<sup>31</sup> A brief exchange is deleted here between Strauss and Metzel, who, it appears, had agreed to submit a paper on the *Clouds*. The date on which the first class on the *Clouds* would take place, and hence the date on which the paper was due, is the subject of the exchange, which goes as follows:

**Mr. Metzel:** Well you told me Monday, so I...right before you got back again.

**LS:** I said Monday?

**Mr. Metzel:** Monday.

**LS:** I’m almost sure I—no—of one thing I am sure, that I *meant* to say Wednesday.

**Mr. Metzel:** You meant to say Wednesday, but you said there is nothing else today.

**LS:** I said, oh, but you are right. I said the 11<sup>th</sup> of, ya. But you see how much we can be deceived. Good. Then we have simply to help you a bit in writing your paper, for I will be dealing with the *Clouds* directly.

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “the question—.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “That means—.”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted: “How can you.”

<sup>35</sup> Changed from “Where—the question, of course, arises, how can you—is it not reason which establishes the social value—in which there is a certain difficulty.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “you know”

<sup>37</sup> Deleted “the only Marxist.”

<sup>38</sup> Deleted “Khrushchev—what am I saying?”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “this is—.”

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “Well—is it—we have this phrase, where to—.”

<sup>41</sup> Deleted “For raising—I mean—.”

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “But that—.”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “we come—.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “whatever.”

<sup>45</sup> Deleted “And whether—for example—can you study—.”

<sup>46</sup> Deleted “they are most—almost certainly—.”

<sup>47</sup> Deleted “the most—.”

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- <sup>48</sup> Deleted “not.”  
<sup>49</sup> Deleted “if you speak about adjust—.”  
<sup>50</sup> Deleted “for pract—.”  
<sup>51</sup> Deleted “I think it is a practical—.”  
<sup>52</sup> Deleted “I would—.”  
<sup>53</sup> Deleted “But that—.”  
<sup>54</sup> Deleted “I would say—.”  
<sup>55</sup> Deleted “Whether this—.”  
<sup>56</sup> Deleted “That—yes—maybe—I mean I do not [unconsciously?] really—.”  
<sup>57</sup> Deleted “But that is—.”  
<sup>58</sup> Deleted “take—.”  
<sup>59</sup> Moved “that.”  
<sup>60</sup> Deleted “: if you reach this—and.”  
<sup>61</sup> Deleted “and.”  
<sup>62</sup> Deleted “of—.”  
<sup>63</sup> Deleted “next time—.”  
<sup>64</sup> Deleted “simplistic—.”  
<sup>65</sup> Deleted “not.”

### Session 3: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —into the details of that argument. Apart from it, you have the great merit of having restated the accepted view, and I think that is very good at the beginning of our discussion,<sup>i</sup> to have it presented to us. <sup>i</sup> This is, well, with minor variations, the accepted view: that this is a slanderous attack on Socrates without any foundation in fact, justified to some extent—as you put it, better than some other people do on this point—by Socrates’s strangeness. So it is a justifiable error to that extent, but above all by the medium<sup>2</sup> which Aristophanes uses, namely, comedy. No comic poet is supposed to be a reporter of nothing but demonstrated fact. And you emphasized very strongly the contrast between this avaricious, filthy, immoral fellow, Socrates, and the Socrates whom we revere. That is surely true. But can we leave it at that? If Aristophanes had been such an unqualified slanderer, which he would be in spite of all mitigating circumstances, how could Plato have presented him as being together with Socrates in a perfectly nice and gentlemanly way, as he did in his *Banquet*? The dramatic date of the *Banquet* is about seven years after the *Clouds*, so that is a first indication.

The second point: Was Socrates always the revered Socrates? I mean, this wonderful character is presented—he referred especially to the *Apology* and *Crito*; that was of course [when] Socrates was an old man. But Socrates was born not as a revered Socrates, but just as any other human baby. And what did he do when he was young? Was he already at that time the revered Socrates? Now again we have simple Platonic evidence. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates himself, on the day of his death, says that he was *not* always the revered Socrates, that originally he was engaged in that kind of natural science which he later on rejected as wrong, subversive, immoral, or what have you.<sup>ii</sup> So Socrates admits that he was originally led astray, as quite a few other people were. And perhaps<sup>3</sup> that is the minimum one would have to say: that Aristophanes shows that early Socrates, the young Socrates, and had not seen that complete change which Socrates had undergone in the meantime. But again, perhaps<sup>4</sup> Aristophanes was not so familiar with Socrates that he knew that change which took place in Socrates himself, ya, and was known only to the people most familiar with Socrates. And incidentally, it is not only Plato who says that; Xenophon too, although that is less well known.

In Xenophon’s writing *Oeconomicus*, which I would have loved to read with you, but which we can’t read because of the idiocies of the printers or publishers, in this *Oeconomicus*—that is also dated after the *Clouds* by some references—Socrates is presented as a man who does not know what a perfect gentleman is. He just doesn’t know it. He is presented there as a fellow who is interested in all kinds of high things, but he doesn’t know what a gentleman is. And he has to go out of his way, literally, to find out what a gentleman is, and he does this in the most naïve way. He has heard that a certain individual is known to everyone as a perfect gentleman, as a prototype, and he asks him point blank: What do you do so that everyone calls you a gentleman?<sup>iii</sup> And that is the source of Socrates’s knowledge of gentlemanship. Again, it shows

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<sup>i</sup> Strauss responds to a student’s paper, probably Mr. Metzel’s, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

<sup>ii</sup> *Phaedo* 96a-99d.

<sup>iii</sup> Strauss paraphrases *Oeconomicus* 7.2.

that there was a time when Socrates did not know, was not concerned [with] and was even in a way ignorant of the moral political things and concerned with other things.

Now this applies also to one special point: Socrates had no school. How do you know that? From Plato and Xenophon. But Plato and Xenophon present to us the revered Socrates, not the young Socrates. I do not say that Socrates, the young Socrates, had a school. I don't know that. But nor can I say the contrary, because I don't know. In other words, that Aristophanes should have made a caricature in which every element was a mere invention is an unsupportable assertion, and I believe even not a plausible assertion.

Now there is another point which one must consider if one speaks of this position, or the enmity of Aristophanes to Socrates, because your interpretation really implies that there is an enmity there. Now enmities ordinarily arise among people who are not quite self-centered, on political grounds rather than on the philosophical. Now you've stated very clearly to us that Aristophanes was what is now called a conservative. You even referred to Burke, not entirely wrongly, and it is sure that the standard for Aristophanes at first glance is the good old times, old Athens, not this terrible New-Dealish Athens of his time, because there are parallels to that. And please don't misconstrue what I say as revealing any political opinion of my own; I only try to use simple contemporary parlance to make it a bit clearer. Now where did the revered Socrates stand politically? And the revered Plato? And the revered Xenophon?

**Mr. Metzel:** He desires to get rid of most tradition.

**LS:** No, that is not what you—

**Mr. Metzel:** In that it—

**LS:** I meant politically. Now there was a very simple case. At a certain time in this country (perhaps it is still today) you could identify politically an individual by raising the question: What do you think of Roosevelt? I mean FDR, F. D. Roosevelt. There was a certain individual in Athens who had a certain, really a comparable position, also a traitor to his class: Pericles. Now the simple thing is, however, the practical question: How did you stand [with respect] to Pericles? Now how did Plato stand [with respect] to Pericles? Absolutely negative[ly], like any radical country club member in this country to Roosevelt. Clear. In brief, politically<sup>5</sup>—I mean, really now, on the level of day-to-day politics, there is no difference between Plato and Xenophon on the one hand, and Aristophanes on the other. This reason for enmity did not exist. I would go further and say the fact of enmity is still to be proven, but there is surely a criticism of Aristophanes against Socrates, and we have to discover the meaning of this criticism. And that has very much to do with our question, namely, the origins of social science or political science, with which we are concerned.<sup>6</sup>

Now let us first begin with the first impressions.<sup>7</sup> What can the *Clouds* possibly have to do with our problem today? Well, very loosely expressed, to use a phrase which Mr. Metzel used, Socrates is a sophist. And what does that mean? Again, very simply, a man who denies morality, that is to say traditional ancestral morality. And this suggests to us immediately, on the basis of

our knowledge of Plato and Xenophon, the *true* Socrates in contradistinction to Aristophanes's, was a man who discovered *rational* morality in contradistinction to merely traditional morality.

Now what then is the relation between rational morality and traditional morality? Well, how would you say what it is? I mean, again starting from the revered Socrates, as we must start because that is the first stratum of our knowledge in these matters. You see, traditional morality, defended by Aristophanes, attacked by Aristophanes's Socrates, but the true Socrates, the Platonic Socrates, does not simply defend traditional morality as such. He's concerned with rational morality. What is the relation of the true rational morality to traditional morality from this point of view?

**Mr. Metzel:** The traditional morality is based upon experience. Kind of a—well, I still equate him here with Burke—

**LS:** Ya, that is dangerous, because Burke's reflections belong to a much later age, where so many things which are here still in the process of emerging, in the process of being established, had already become a tradition of many centuries. Ya? And therefore—I mean, it is not bad in a very initial statement to refer to Burke, but it is also not very helpful if we try to understand better.

What I have in mind is this. The rational morality is surely based on reason. The traditional morality is based on tradition. But nevertheless they might have the same content. For example, traditional morality says you should not beat your father—an example which plays a major role in the comedy—and rational morality might say the same thing. But prior to investigation, we cannot know whether they fully agree, whether the new morality, the rational morality discovered by Socrates, will back up the traditional morality on every point. That is a great question. We owe it especially to Hegel, whose influence for the understanding of classical philosophy is overpowering up to the present time, that we are inclined to believe the content was not changed but only the mode was changed. That is a very great question, and I will later on give some reasons but I mention here only the fact.

The second question which arises at this stage and which is most important to us: Is Socrates the founder of rational morality? Socrates is the founder of the view that value judgments can be validated in a perfectly unobjectionable way. And we must see later on<sup>8</sup> what this means in Socrates and what the basis of that is.

Now of these two things, what the true revered Socrates did, we hear of course nothing in the *Clouds* because there the old Socrates—ya, I mean the pre-Socratic Socrates, if I may say so—is the only one who occurs. Still, what we learn from the *Clouds* is by no means negligible. In the *Clouds* we are presented, we are shown a Socrates who is very far from establishing a rational morality, who in fact attacks the traditional morality radically without suggesting any new morality we could respect. He suggests a new morality—that's exactly the point—but this morality seems to be altogether subversive. It includes, for example, the principle that a son may beat his father, to say nothing of other examples which occur. Now this position, then, which Socrates appears to defend in the *Clouds* has something in common with a view which is prevalent today in the social sciences, with what is loosely called relativism. And just as in the

case of present-day social science relativism, the intellectual power behind that is “quote science unquote.” Socrates is presented primarily as a natural scientist, and this natural science issues in a subversive moral teaching.

Now in the *Clouds* Socrates is presented as a scientist, and that means—to mention only one point, which is in fact the most important point—there are no gods. Hence there are no sanctions for morality. You see, that is the crucial point in the *Clouds*. The traditional morality is a morality sanctioned by the gods, and therefore if the belief in the gods fails, morality fails. But more specifically—and that you can say is a difficulty which cannot possibly happen in our world, in the biblical world—the difficulty here is that the gods, the guardians of traditional morality, behave themselves immorally. So whenever you are told something—“This is just, this is what you ought to do and what your fathers and grandfathers and ancestors have done before you”—a naughty young man can say: “Well, the greatest authority of all, Zeus, did all these terrible things. So?” So that is the weakness of that morality, and you see also the connection here with Plato immediately. Plato’s critique of the poets, as it is called, in the second book of the *Republic* is necessary in order to find a solid base of morality. The gods as understood by the Greeks are no such basis.

At any rate, Socrates, as a scientist who has discovered that these gods are nothing, discovers by this very fact that traditional morality has no sanction. And being a consistent man, he preaches immorality. That’s the first act. But what happens? That is, what’s going on in the latter part of the comedy, but it doesn’t end on that strain. What happens? You didn’t tell us that.

**Mr. Metzel:** I didn’t—I was—

**LS:** What happens? I mean, Socrates preaches immorality on these grounds. All right, and what happens after he has preached it, after he has taught it?

**Mr. Metzel:** After he has taught it? The child is not the tool of his father, as his father had hoped.

**LS:** I beg your pardon?

**Mr. Metzel:** The son is not the tool of his father, is not the—

**LS:** But very simply, what happens? Does it end with Socrates sitting on the throne as a tyrant?

**Mr. Metzel:** No, Socrates’s school is burned.

**LS:** So in other words, the citizen who has come under the influence of this immoral teaching revolts, revolts and takes revenge. The dialogue presents at first glance a revolt of the honest citizens who *know* the need for morality, who experience that need against that academic abomination presented by Socrates. You can say it very simply. One part of the teaching—why this is necessarily a part, we shall see later—is [that] a son may beat his father. That’s what the new teaching says. A son may beat his father with the same right with which the father beats his son. Now what is the reaction of the father? Let us forget now about the dialogue. It is a

preposterous teaching, because it destroys domestic discipline and it leads to corruption of the young, naturally. Well, again, we don't have to go so far away to understand that. We have today a phenomenon, which is of great concern to many citizens and social scientists, called juvenile delinquency. Socrates brings about juvenile delinquency, and if that is not an evil, I don't know what an evil is—that's the simple reaction of the citizen. Our social science admits it as a matter of course, although it doesn't, say, allow a value judgment. Now incidentally, why does not our social scientist who is confronted by the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency go on as Aristophanes did [and] say: If juvenile delinquency is a consequence of this kind of teaching, must this teaching not be wrong? Must it not be radically revised? Must we not restore the old moral teaching? What I have in mind is this: What is the difference—I mean, on the most superficial descriptive level—between the present-day social science student of juvenile delinquency and Aristophanes or his hero Strepsiades? Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** The present-day onlooker would perhaps say that the direction is correct but the application is wrong, and this has to be modified and changed and perfected.

**LS:** Ya, that is true, but very general. Where does the difference between the present-day, the typical present-day social scientist and Aristophanes's Strepsiades come in?

**Mr. Metzel:** The social scientist today is not primarily interested in changing it.

**LS:** Oh, no. I mean, there are innumerable studies and suggestions and social analyses of juvenile delinquency by social scientists. I'm sorry that I'm not in the department of sociology, but if you had known that, I would have called up one of my colleagues there, and [they would have] told me how many articles have appeared in the last year of the *American Journal of Sociology*. I don't know it from my own knowledge, but—

**Mr. Metzel:** Is it presented though in his true role that he can justify as social scientist?

**LS:** Yes.<sup>9</sup> I mean, let us not be too subtle in this very elementary stage. But what is the difference? To repeat, the comedy of Aristophanes suggests to us a teaching which leads up to juvenile delinquency must be wrong. In a way, the present-day social scientist would admit that too, but what's the difference in the diagnosis? What is the wrong teaching?<sup>10</sup> What is the basic error? The basic error according to Aristophanes is the destruction of domestic authority, of paternal authority. Here's where the difference comes. The social scientist would be less impressed by the need for paternal authority. The term which occurs not only in social science literature—which I haven't read, but which I know only from hearsay—but also in law courts when juvenile delinquents are arraigned is lack of love, lack of comprehension: the nagging mother, the drunken father, and so on and so on. But no emphasis on paternal authority as such is mentioned. In other words, the social scientist would be afraid of that, because he thinks paternal authority, as all authority, if too much stressed, leads to authoritarianism. And that is a thought which is wholly absent of course from Aristophanes. I wish to show you the complexity.

There is another point that is a clear sign. There is one institution of which we find an indication<sup>11</sup> in the comedy which Aristophanes absolutely takes for granted and everyone else takes for granted—at least no one contests [it]—and that is the institution of slavery. Strepsiades



has a slave whom he owns, takes for granted. So there is some difference here, surely. We can say what distinguishes the social scientist from Aristophanes is not only the value traits, the alleged freedom from values; it is also a certain notion of freedom which the social scientist in fact has in spite of his claim to accept<sup>12</sup> his social sciences value-free, and which in this sense does not exist in Aristophanes. But what distinguishes the social scientist from Socrates? I mean also the broad difference. Don't say the difference is that the social scientist is an empirical student and Socrates is not, because Socrates is presented in the comedy as an empirical student of certain phenomena. But which phenomena does Socrates *not* study empirically which the social scientist does? Well, what is an empirical phenomenon which Socrates studies there, or some of them? And one example will suffice, because they are all of the same kind.

**Mr. Metzel:** Astronomy.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Metzel:** Astronomy.

**LS:** Astronomy. Or how far can a flea jump. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** They're not humanly relevant.

**LS:** Yes. In other words, he studies only natural phenomena. He does not engage in the empirical study of human phenomena, of social phenomena. Why does he not do that? Why does Socrates, this empirical student of nature as he is presented here, not dream for one moment of the empirical study of human social phenomena, political phenomena? What do natural phenomena have that social phenomena do not have?

**Mr. Metzel:** Objectivity.

**LS:** That is a modern expression, which points in the right direction, but the Greeks used somewhat different expressions which are more helpful. What is the status of social phenomena, for example,<sup>13</sup> of such a thing as beating or not beating one's father? What is that?

**Mr. Metzel:** Values.

**LS:** A term which doesn't exist. What is it? I mean, how else would it be called also today by a not sophisticated or not corrupted man?<sup>14</sup>

**Mr. Metzel:** Theory?

**LS:** No. A law, a law. It doesn't have to be a written law, but it is a law which you cannot transgress. A law. So what covers the social phenomena is that they are either laws or based on laws. And what is wrong with that? Natural phenomena, even such humble things as how far a flea can jump, are serious objects of study. Social phenomena are not, and that is connected with the fact that the social phenomena are laws, have the status of laws, are dependent on laws. I mean, what is the basic defect of laws from this point of view, the cognitive defect of laws?

**Mr. Metzel:** Man is governed by laws which he makes himself?

**LS:** Yes, that is true, but that is not in itself decisive. He could make them differently. The laws, all laws, are arbitrary, however good reason they may seem to have. That's the basis, the principle. And therefore it has no solidity. It depends on mere fiat. That the flea jumps this way, not that way: that is not arbitrary, that is of the nature of things. In other words, laws and everything depending on laws have to exaggerate this status of stamp collecting. You see, we know there are many people who collect stamps, but other people collect butterflies. But the collection of butterflies has a higher status, because that is really a natural phenomenon and where we can learn something about the whole. But stamps are arbitrarily made, and there are certain rules which you can perhaps observe which are curious. I think one can say the variety and beauty of stamps is a sign of bankruptcy, at least in former times. And the solid countries had always the same dreary stamps: think of Queen Victoria's England. Today things have changed because of the influence of stamp collecting on stamp production. [Laughter] But this is not a serious thing; that is the point. So in other words, Socrates despises the social phenomena because they are based on law, on human arbitrariness. That is the obvious difference between Socrates and the present-day social scientist.<sup>15</sup> Behind the present-day social scientist,<sup>16</sup> which is no longer immediately visible, is the notion that social phenomena are as natural as natural phenomena in the narrow sense. Behind it. For example, when you speak of such a law, as it is called, of supply and demand, it is meant to be a law as independent of human arbitrariness as any Newtonian law. This notion is wholly absent from this first phase.

Now one must also mention, if only in passing, the following point, because it may come in later on. A certain parallelism between Aristophanes's Socrates and social science exists. The true Socrates, the revered Socrates, the Platonic Socrates opposes this Aristophanean Socrates, surely.<sup>17</sup> True, the Platonic Socrates agrees with Aristophanes. What is the difference between Plato, let me say, and Aristophanes? Did Plato or Plato's Socrates express scientifically, rationally, what Aristophanes expressed poetically? I mean, Aristophanes in a comedy shows the preposterous character of this teaching. Plato shows the preposterous character of this teaching by argument, by an allegedly demonstrative argument. In other words, we must not forget this question, that Aristophanes's argument against<sup>18</sup> his Socrates is poetical. By telling a tale, he refutes it. Plato refutes that position, not by telling a tale, so it seems, but universally.

Now what does the difference between these two forms of expression mean, between the poetic expression and the scientific expression? The dramatic poet of course has one tremendous advantage, it would seem: he demonstrates *ad oculos*. We see with our own eyes where this leads to. No scientific argument can do that, because we would have to make the transformation from the universal statement into some visible fact by our own effort. The dramatic poet does this for us. But it is of course also true that there is also a weakness of the poetic argument. Here we have Socrates and Strepsiades, the two chief characters. These are two individuals, and what is true of these two individuals with their individual characteristics in an individual situation may not be true of<sup>19</sup> two [other] individuals. So that Socrates—the revolt of the citizen, which is here beautifully demonstrated, may not take place if the scientist were somewhat different from Socrates and if the citizen were somewhat different from Strepsiades. That is the limitation of the poetic argument, whereas the scientific argument would be of universal validity.

There is another point I mention in this context. It's a comedy; Socrates is ridiculed. Ridiculed. We laugh. Is this laughing not also a form of convincing? I mean, is making men laugh not a form of convincing them? You know, in a scientific argument, laughing or making people laugh is not permitted to be legitimate, but<sup>20</sup> in a comedy that is surely done. What is it? What makes us laugh? What makes us laugh? And is that which makes us laugh not something connected with evidence? We laugh about all kinds of things. But we laugh also, and that seems to be the case here, about massive absurdities.<sup>21</sup> If we are suddenly confronted with a massive absurdity, are we not compelled to laugh, and is this laughing not an essential concomitant of the realization of the massive absurdity? That also is a point we must keep in mind.

But now let us go into the details after these very general remarks,<sup>22</sup> some of which are in need of revision. Strepsiades is the antagonist of Socrates. I have assumed up to now that he is *the* citizen who revolts against this immoral teaching. I have assumed, in other words, that Strepsiades is the normal citizen. Is he a normal citizen? Is his action against Socrates the action of a normal citizen? What do you say to that?

**Mr. Metzel:** No.

**LS:** He is not a normal citizen. If he is not the normal citizen and his action is not that of the normal citizen, what does the comedy prove? What do we have to think of Socrates if he comes to grief only by virtue of the action of an abnormal citizen? Do you see? So we must open the question by going into the details. We are in need of patience. Not everything of importance reveals itself, reveals its meaning, immediately. So we are in need of patient observation, as we are also when we do other things. We must wait and not force any schema onto things until a pattern emerges. Not everything is fit to be digested into a reader's digest. In other words, we have to read with some care. It goes without saying that we cannot read this work with the necessary care. There are limits—I mean, the absolute limit, to speak practically, is the end of the Wednesday meeting, because otherwise we will never read something else, and it is also important that we get a notion of some other Aristophanean comedies and of the revered Socrates from the model Plato if this course is to fulfill its function.

Now let us turn to the *Clouds* and begin at the beginning. Strepsiades is in the night. Strepsiades is awake, and he is ill-tempered, as most people are when they are sleepless, and he thinks of the good old times of peace. And now there is war—it was the Peloponnesian War. Here at the beginning he presents himself indeed as a normal citizen who is annoyed by the hardships of war, and especially of a war which doesn't seem to be so necessary. And<sup>23</sup> more particularly, he [also] appears as a rustic. And the rustics, the farmers, were regarded by the reactionaries, by the conservatives, as the most respectable part of the democracy. That's one part of the background still intelligible, as is proven by all gerrymanderings by the provisions of the Constitution regarding the Senate, the United States Senate, and the House of Representatives and so on. It's still the same story, fundamentally. And Aristophanes's sympathy is generally with the rural population against the rabble of the city, to quote a Jeffersonian expression.<sup>iv</sup> So he is a normal character.

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<sup>iv</sup> Thomas Jefferson wrote, for example, in a letter to Lafayette that the "yeomanry of the United States are not the rabble of Paris." Letter to Lafayette, February 14, 1815.

But he has a peculiarity which appears immediately. And what is that? At first glance, his peculiarity: What distinguishes him from the thousands like him? He has a son, a peculiar son, and he has a peculiar indulgence towards that son. And this indulgence has ruined him. Yet beneath that indulgence which shows itself throughout the play, he curses his son because of the trouble that he has created [for] him. He as it were wishes, though he doesn't say it in so many words, that his son had never been born. But he is too delicate to express that. He regrets not the birth of his son but that which made possible the birth of his son, namely, his marriage. What was wrong with his marriage? Well,<sup>24</sup> what keeps him awake are his debts, and he tries to go over his accounts and to find out some way to pay them. But even this he cannot do because his son dreams. He sleeps in the same room. He dreams, and what does he dream of? Of the same thing which is of course [the source] of the father's debts, namely, horses. Horses. His worries which keep him sleepless are due to his son, and his son is responsible for his not being able to handle his worries by his dream speeches.

Now what was wrong with the marriage? We come to that which is the cause of causes. He was a fellow of rustic simplicity, a simple peasant, and then through a matchmaker he was induced to marry a fine lady from the Athenian upper crust.<sup>25</sup> I suppose she must have had some blemish: perhaps she belonged to a poorer branch; perhaps she was not the most beautiful of these ladies. However this may be, he was persuaded by a matchmaker to marry her, and so two wholly unmatchable people, a fellow of rustic simplicity and contentedness, an easygoing fellow, married to a fine lady accustomed to pomp and to an overindulgence in the pleasures of the body.<sup>26</sup> And this shows itself in the son and simply in the name of the son. The son is called Pheidippides, and part of the name, *hippos*, is horse—the nobility, you know, the knights. *Pheid*, that comes from the Greek word *phaidomai*, which means to save, to be parsimonious, and that is a paternal heritage. The son is meant to combine the virtues of the simple rustic people and the upper class, but unfortunately the maternal heritage is so much more powerful than what he had learned from his father. Strepsiades, in his great troubles—you see, he's *not* a normal citizen. Such *mésalliances* were obviously not common; that belongs to the very definition of a *mésalliance*, that it is not something which takes place all the time. You cannot draw conclusions from present-day America. Strepsiades has to find a way out of his difficulty, but whether that is feasible depends entirely on his son. He cannot give his son orders. That is precluded by this situation. That's crucial. Let us turn to (if you have the translation) page 155, bottom,<sup>v</sup> —verses 88, 89. What does<sup>27</sup> Strepsiades [say] to Pheidippides? Do you have that? “Drive off.”

**Mr. Metzel:** “Strip off your present habits.”

**LS:** Ya. “As quickly as possible.” Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:**

And go and learn what I'll advise you to.<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>v</sup> There is a break in the tape at this point.

<sup>vi</sup> Aristophanes, “*The Clouds*,” in *Five Comedies of Aristophanes*, trans. Benjamin Bickley Rogers. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books), 155, lines 88-89. This translation is also the one found in the original Loeb Classical Library volume, which Strauss most likely consults for the Greek text. Its full citation is Aristophanes, “*The Clouds*,” *Aristophanes, with the English Translation of Benjamin Bickley*

**LS:** Yes. “Strip off these things.” Now the son swears by Dionysus that he will do whatever his father will ask him to do. Now what does the father ask him to do? To go to Socrates to learn there the art of winning any lawsuit. You see, one way of getting rid of your debts is of course to defraud your creditors, and that depends to some extent on your facility before the law court. And<sup>28</sup> that is a very simple device. Here then a slight and not uninteresting difference appears. Strepsiades has heard of “them guys.” He does not know the name of Socrates. He knows only that *they* speak of heaven and that *they* teach for money how one can win any cause, just or unjust. Pheidippides, the son, knows the name. That’s the first interesting difference,<sup>29</sup> which throws light on Socrates and which throws light on the whole situation. To indicate the significance of this for the whole work, I mention only this. Socrates comes to grief through Strepsiades, and Strepsiades is an abnormal citizen. He does not belong to the upper class. He does not belong to the lower class. He belongs to a very small intermediate group. Ya? Intermediate group. The lower class simply wouldn’t take cognizance of Socrates. They are busy. The upper class *do* take cognizance of Socrates. Pheidippides, who is moving in the most elegant society, knows the name of Socrates. Ya? Because having more time they take cognizance of all cultural events in Athens, one of them being . . . But what is the attitude of Pheidippides to Socrates? Utter contempt. These are filthy starvelings: no elegant graces of horsemanship, of sport, and so on and so on. So Socrates is not threatened by the upper class people either. That’s important. Although they know of his existence, whereas the lower-class people don’t.

Well, as soon as Pheidippides really hears that he is supposed to go to Socrates to learn there the art of speaking so that he can talk himself out of his debts, he swears that he will not do that. He will not do that. Originally he had sworn by Dionysus that he will do everything his father says, and he now swears by the same Dionysus that he will not keep the original oath. He perjures himself right at the beginning. The outcome of all this is that old Strepsiades—this small crook, I think as we can call him in fairness, although he has some excuses: he did not live above his condition; it was only his overindulgence to his son, but [he is] still a crook—decides to go to Socrates. But as you will see in verse 127, first he will pray to the gods before he goes to Socrates. So if he is a crook, he is at least pious. He goes to Socrates after having prayed to the gods. He has a perfectly sober judgment about himself: he is an ordinary man in an extraordinary situation. As such, as an ordinary man in an extraordinary situation, he comes in contact with *the* extraordinary man, Socrates. Now he goes to the house of Socrates.<sup>30</sup> To repeat, he didn’t even know his name. That’s very important: Socrates was not well known. I mean, Athens was not a small town; the utmost you could say about Athens is that in Athens everyone knew an acquaintance of everyone else, not [that] everyone knew everyone else. I mean, a small town is one where everyone knows everyone else, but if everyone knows only an acquaintance of everyone else, that’s really a larger town, and that was Athens.

So now he enters the house of Socrates. But of course—or rather, not of course—he knocks at the door, and not Socrates opens, nor for that matter a slave, but a pupil. A pupil. And there is the scene with the pupil which we must briefly discuss. Look it up in your book in case we have to read the one or the other passages. The pupil complains about the rudeness with which

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*Rogers*, vol. 1, translated by Benjamin Bickley Rogers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 261-401.

Strepsiades had knocked at the door, because by this noise he had damaged a tender thought which was just about to be born. And then he finds out what this was, and although the pupil speaks all the time of the great secrecy of the matter, he blabs out everything. So I mean, in other words, if Socrates had made certain security arrangements, they were very poorly enforced and poorly contrived. Socrates is not a very practical man, as appears from the beginning. Now the pupil tells Strepsiades of Socrates's concerns. What did he do? For example, he measured the jump of fleas: how far can a flea jump. Ya?<sup>31</sup> I mean, [this is] in itself of course for a sensible man, a perfectly reasonable biologist a perfectly reasonable question. But from the point of view of someone who is suddenly confronted with adult people doing such things an absurd activity, to be exact, regarding contemptibly unimportant things: Does he not have anything better to do than measure the jump of fleas? Strepsiades is impressed by the cleverness with which Socrates did that. We don't have to go into that. The second question with which Socrates is concerned: Do gnats hum through the mouth or through the behind? Strepsiades is again impressed by the cleverness, but this time with a view to the consequence, namely, that men who are so clever that they can find that out can win every lawsuit. And the third point is that Socrates, or his pupils, observe the ways and revolutions of the moon. In this case Strepsiades is only amused, amused by the ridiculous incident which prevented the observation, in which some lizard did something, dropped a dropping on one, so he couldn't continue observing. That doesn't interest him, as you will see.

These are the three theoretical objects of Socrates which are mentioned, and then we come to a practical one, namely,<sup>32</sup> if I understand the passage correctly—and I understood it in the way in which the commentaries understand it, which does not necessarily mean that it is the correct understanding—that Socrates stole. They didn't have anything to eat. He stole something, a coat which he then sold. But he stole it by means of geometry. Let us call it Socrates's geometric theft. So in other words, he was not absolutely decent, apparently. He did steal, it seems. But of course it's also clear that there is a strange disproportion between this cleverness and the result. They are starving fellows. And after all, a really clever unjust man doesn't have to steal a coat from a gymnasium and sell it so that they have a dinner.

Now at this moment the door is opened and Strepsiades sees first the students, the pupils of Socrates. And there are five different things. Some seek what is beneath the earth, say, the rudiments of geology. But Strepsiades, the farmer, thinks they are looking for onions, which is of course not true. Then the others go to a much deeper depth, so that they have to pick . . . and so that their minds look at the stars. The third is astronomy, the fourth is geometry, and the fifth is geography. The only subject in which Strepsiades is not interested at all is astronomy. Who cares for the heavenly bodies, you know—I mean, you don't live on earth. He's also not impressed by the search beneath the earth, nor by geography. He is impressed to some extent by geometry, because geometry means measuring the earth—literally he says "measuring land." And the prospect of distributing land—you know, of the rich—is of some attraction to a practical rustic.

At this moment Socrates comes to sight. And Socrates is suspended in a basket high above everyone else, and his very first word, verse 218,<sup>vii</sup> is characteristic.<sup>33</sup> Strepsiades calls: "Socrates! Little Socrates!" How would you say—how would<sup>34</sup> a mother have called a young Socrates as a baby, for little Socrates? Yes, "Sockie! Sockie!" perhaps. [Laughter] And then

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<sup>vii</sup> Socrates's first line is line 223.

Socrates says: What do you call me, you ephemeral being, you creature who lives only a day? His contempt for man is the first sign of Socrates. He lives on high, not on the earth, the earth which Strepsiades cultivates. And the thought behind it is that subtle thoughts can thrive only in the subtle air. Thin thoughts require thin air. The “quote materialism” implied in this doctrine is a very important position; and we know from Plato, Plato’s *Phaedo*, that the view from which Socrates started was a materialistic philosophy of nature.

Socrates comes down and Strepsiades tells Socrates why he has come: in order to learn from him. And he offers payment. And now we get a very great surprise, and this is one point which I must hold against Mr. Metzel as well as against a common interpretation. Socrates is absolutely uninterested in the money. He doesn’t even listen to him. Absolutely uninterested. And there are some later references to money or to other gifts, but they are never requests of Socrates. Strepsiades, out of gratitude, brings him some flour or whatever it is—Socrates just isn’t interested in them. Not at all. But Socrates is interested in something else, which is much more important to him and which is much more grave and which is much more strange. To use a very harsh word to convey the shock, Socrates is not interested at all in his money but in his atheism, in his denying of the gods whom everyone worships. And apparently Socrates is, you can say, a kind of fanatic—you know, that would be a first impression—who wants to sell these new gods.<sup>35</sup> He initiates Strepsiades<sup>36</sup> [in them]. And that is very important. This Socrates, who rejects the gods whom everyone knows and worships, has gods of his own. And he has a cult of his own; he has new gods, strange gods. And who are the strange gods? In the first place, the Clouds. The Clouds—the play is called the *Clouds* and, in a way, the Clouds rather than Socrates are the heroes of the play. Of the Clouds it is said that they inspire the sophists and poets. Now sophists doesn’t necessarily have here the pejorative meaning. Sophists means simply the wise men who speak or write prose. The poets are the wise men who speak in meter.<sup>37</sup> The Clouds are the thing which appear first. What is the relation between sophistry and poetry on the one [hand]—between wisdom on the one hand, and the Clouds on the other?

**Mr. Metzel:** The Clouds are transitory in shape and appearance. They come and go.<sup>38</sup> There’s no kind of absolute basis or concrete foundation to lay anything onto the Clouds.

**LS:** Ya, but something more specific is said.

**Mr. Metzel:** They appear this to one man, and to another something else.

**LS:** Yes, but one must say this more precisely as it is said: they imitate everything. A cloud looks like a horse, like an old man with a beard, you know, all kinds of figures we choose. The Clouds imitate everything, and therefore they are the origin of all imitative art. That is the assertion. They make visible; by imitating, they make visible the nature of things. That is the meaning of the Clouds. Anticipating some later points, I would say this: Socrates is engaged in two activities. The first is what we can call natural science in the widest sense of the word, what was called physiology, the speaking about nature, not merely what we now understand by physiology.<sup>viii</sup> —Socrates says<sup>39</sup> [the Clouds are] the only gods. Zeus doesn’t exist. And on the other hand, the Clouds help or serve only Socrates. That is an alliance which is underlying the whole play. And therefore it is crucial for the understanding of the play: Do the Clouds also

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<sup>viii</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

suffer from Socrates's misfortunes as Socrates obviously suffers? You know? We shall see the Clouds are much cleverer than Socrates. They don't suffer. So the Clouds are the only gods. Zeus does not even exist, let alone that he has any power to harm or hurt.<sup>40</sup>

That is the first theme between Socrates and Strepsiades. Everyone thought Zeus was responsible for raining. Yes? "Zeus is raining"—it is said that Zeus does *hyei*. Socrates says: Nonsense. The Clouds rain, make rain. And he gives proof. He says: Did you ever see rain without clouds?<sup>ix</sup> You know, you must not underestimate this very funny presentation. The argument shows that. The Clouds therefore take the place of Zeus because they are responsible for rain. But then Strepsiades still is not quite satisfied. It is not so simple. Granting that Zeus doesn't rain but the Clouds are responsible for rain, is not Zeus still higher than the Clouds? Is there not some compelling force, some necessity which makes the Clouds do what they do behind them? [Verse] 379 following. Socrates knows, he admits, there is<sup>41</sup> a cause of what the Clouds do. But that's not Zeus. That is "Whirl." Whirl. Is this intelligible in my pronunciation? W-h-i-r-l. Yes? Whirl? Good.

Now let us read on page 167 in the translation, say, in about the middle of the page where Socrates begins to speak. Mr. Metzel, do you have it?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Socrates:] For when to the brim filled with water they swim, by Necessity carried along,

They are hung up on high in the vault of the sky, and so by Necessity strong  
In the midst of their course, they clash with great force, and thunder away without end.

[Strepsiades:] But is it not he, who compels this to be? Does not Zeus this Necessity send?

**LS:** Ya. Well, you see, that is a question. You know, that is the point. Is there not some cause which causes the Clouds to act, and is that not Zeus? To which Socrates says?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Soc.:] "No Zeus have we there, but a Vortex of air."

**LS:** All right, "Vortex," we have. Yes, a Vortex,<sup>42</sup> and being in the ether: an "ethereal Vortex." Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Str.:] Vortex?<sup>x</sup> that's something, I own.

I knew not before, that Zeus was no more, but Vortex was placed on his throne! But I have not yet heard to what cause you referred the thunder's majestic roar.

[Soc.:] Oh yes,<sup>xi</sup> 'tis they, when on high, full of water they fly, and then, as I told you before,

<sup>ix</sup> *Clouds*, ll. 370. Strauss's translation. Citations to line numbers are hereafter made in the text.

<sup>x</sup> Rogers has "What! Vortex?"

<sup>xi</sup> Rogers has simply "Yes."



By Compression impelled, as they clash, are compelled a terrible crash is made.<sup>xii</sup>  
 [Str.:] Come, how can that be? I really don't see.  
 [Soc.:] Yourself as my proof I will take.  
 Have you never then eat<sup>43</sup> the broth-puddings you get when Panathenaea comes  
 around<sup>xiii</sup>—

**LS:** The festival, yes.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Soc.:] “And felt with what might your bowels all night in turbulent tumult resound?”

**LS:** Go on.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Str.:] By Apollo, 'tis true, there's a mighty to-do, and my belly keeps rumbling  
 about  
 When the puddings<sup>xiv</sup> begin to clatter within and kick up a wonderful rout:  
 Quite gently at first, papapax, papapax, but soon pappapappax-ing<sup>xv</sup> away,<sup>44</sup>  
 Till at last, I'll be bound, I can thunder as loud, papapappappapappax, as  
 They. [Laughter]

**LS:** Go on. Two more lines.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Soc.:] Shall thou then of a sound<sup>xvi</sup> so loud and profound from thy belly  
 diminutive send,  
 And shall not the high and the infinite Sky go thundering on without end? (376-393)

**LS:** Ya, but literally, you know, the air. In other words, he brings a very homely experience and says: Look what happens on a cosmic scale in the case of thunder, and here we discover air as that which is above the Clouds—I mean, not only locally but as causing what the Clouds do. Still, Strepsiades is not completely convinced, because there is one fact which the air doesn't do and the Clouds do not do, namely, Zeus is the guardian of justice, and he uses his lightning<sup>45</sup> for striking the perjurers. Ya? That is a fact. And how does Socrates reply to that? That's the last straw for Strepsiades: Zeus as avenger of perjury. And<sup>46</sup> [Socrates] says: Well, are not these guys notorious perjurers and never struck by lightning, and on the other hand, is not Zeus's own temple struck by his lightning? So what you regard as a fact, that Zeus<sup>47</sup> uses lightning for striking perjurers, is not a fact. Strepsiades is completely convinced of the truth of Socrates's teaching. And that is enormous! Imagine a simple rustic completely corrupted in less than an hour! Don't underestimate that.

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<sup>xii</sup> Rogers has “a terrible clatter to make.”

<sup>xiii</sup> Rogers has simply “round.”

<sup>xiv</sup> Rogers has “rumbling about;/And the puddings.”

<sup>xv</sup> Rogers omits “-ing.”

<sup>xvi</sup> Rogers has “Shalt thou then a sound.”

So<sup>48</sup> we know now the truth about the earth. There is the highest principle: you can call it Vortex, as it is sometimes called; you can also call it air; you can also call it ether—that is not so very clearly distinguished. It's not that important. And then we have this subordinate principle called the Clouds. And<sup>49</sup> the highest principle corresponds to physics or physiology, which seeks the nature of things in their highest principle; and then the other is rhetoric, represented by the Clouds, as we shall see later.

Now at this point the Clouds encourage Strepsiades to become clever, that is to say, to become victorious in action, in deliberation, and in speech. The Clouds help Socrates in getting a pupil. They are his publicity agents at this point. Socrates, however, demands that Strepsiades must not respect or recognize any other gods except Chaos, Clouds, and the Tongue. That is only another formulation of the same thing, because the highest principle,<sup>50</sup> call it ether, being completely senseless, mindless can very well be called Chaos. Chaos is the absolute absence of order: there is no meaningful order, and why not call it Chaos? And the Clouds of course are that which inspires the Tongue, and then the Tongue is the greatest human instrument.

Strepsiades promises to do that. The Clouds listen to this but they are silent about it, just as they were silent when Socrates was setting forth his rejection of the old gods. They don't say anything. They are very shrewd. They think of their advantage. But they are shrewd; they are the gods. I mean, one must see how the whole thing will run, and that they wait. They repeat their promise even after they have heard that what Strepsiades desires is to learn only to win law suits by tricky means and to get rid of his debtors. They are not concerned in Strepsiades's becoming a sage, a student of nature. What they're concerned with is Strepsiades's becoming their worshiper. And he will become their worshiper, of course, if through them he will get rid of his debts. And they promise him that: You will lead the most enviable life of human beings together with us<sup>xvii</sup> if you undergo the training by Socrates.

The Clouds also encourage Socrates to begin Socrates's instruction and first, naturally, to test Strepsiades's mind. In other words, what we do here by looking for the reports from college, written reports, records from college, which didn't exist [at that time],<sup>51</sup> or for that matter by IQs, is here done by a simple examination. That is the next thing. Socrates investigates Strepsiades's nature. This account is incomplete, because Socrates and Strepsiades enter the house and we don't know what is going on in the house. What happened there? The Chorus, speaking for the poet, addresses the audience. You see, that is one of the most obvious differences between tragedy and comedy in olden times. In the tragedy, the tragic poet never addresses the audience. In the comedy—at least in the Aristophanean comedy—an important part is the so-called *parabasis*, in which the poet, the Chorus, and especially the leader of the Chorus, addresses the audience in the name of the poet. Now that is also important.

Aristophanes raises the claim that the *Clouds*<sup>52</sup> [is] his cleverest comedy. Now that is a difficult question, because of the comedies we have, it is the third earliest, and we do not know whether this judgment would extend to the later comedies. But that is a difficult question on which I have no judgment, because there is a tradition that Aristophanes rewrote it—you know, he rather failed in that contest and that he rewrote it, and that we have now the second version, which of course in that case would have been written later. I regard it as possible that Aristophanes meant

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<sup>xvii</sup> *Clouds* 464-5.

this judgment even at the end of his career, but this is a mere guess. And what does he say in praise of that comedy, especially its lack of grossness? It is really comparatively [decent]. Although you have read a passage which was rather crude, and there are some others of the same kind, but they are much more decent. The *Clouds* is much more decent than almost all other comedies. The most shocking words, which in English I understand would now be called four-letter words, are extremely rare here; and if I am correct, Socrates himself never uses one of them. It is a lack of grossness.

He speaks of another point: the *novelty* of the conceits. Underlining it: *novelty*. That is important. The poet doesn't say anything here of his moral or political motivation, and that is perfectly intelligent.<sup>53</sup> And that leads us to believe the . . . of Aristophanes and not any others. Politically speaking, he has a simple standard: the good old times. And that can be historically defined: Athens of the Persian War, two or three generations before. The old times, the ancestral polity, as the Athenians called that order of things prior to the democracy, where the upper classes, the rural populations, still were in control. But as a poet, his whole glory depends on his inventiveness, on his having novel concepts. Do you see that? I mean, the merely political interpretation of Aristophanes which is today predominant is at odds, obviously at odds, with the simple fact that the comic poet as comic poet, or any poet, is as such concerned with novelty. Such things didn't exist before Aristophanes. You can say that is a remedy for later corruption. The victors of Marathon did not need comedy, only these corrupt Athenians of the time of the Peloponnesian War needed that as a correction.

But you cannot help wondering: Is not a corruption which requires such a remedy as Aristophanean comedy not also something good? In other words, if you have rustic simplicity without that life of the mind developed, that's fine. But if you have a certain amount of rottenness, which is the inevitable condition for the mind taking its highest flight, what are you going to do? That's a nice value question. A nice value question. Can you simply decide in favor of rustic simplicity if you see, on the basis of this experience, for example, that a certain dissolution, a certain disintegration compels the mind to rise to heights to which it otherwise never would have risen? That is the great theme of all the classical literature. And the simple symbol of it is Sparta-Athens; for example, in Thucydides's *History*, where he wisely simplifies in order to bring out the problem. Here you have a political model, be it the public spirit, and so on, Sparta; and here you have this extremely fragile Athens, where the civic spirit, the public spirit, is weakened in many respects and where old simple honesty is no longer in control as it was said to be in Sparta. On the other hand, the understanding of all these things was possible only in Athens, where Thucydides wrote, and Plato, and Socrates,<sup>xviii</sup> and all the others. That is the problem.<sup>54</sup>

One can say that the problem of Aristophanes, as stated immediately, is this: the direct contrast between his apparent political objective (the old, respectable order) and the *means* which he uses (the comedy, these novel means) that indicates the problem. That Aristophanes *enjoyed* doing what he did I think goes without saying. He enjoyed something which was dependent on corruption and which could not help to some extent increasing the corruption, because, I mean, [whether] all listeners to Aristophanes's comedies would have gone home with the firm resolve

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<sup>xviii</sup> Strauss refers here merely to Socrates's Athenian citizenship, for as he notes, "Socrates never wrote" (session 1).

to be now Marathon fighters and not more impressed by these magnificent jokes—some gross; the best of course not gross—that’s anybody’s guess. And let us beware of the simplicity which would perhaps do honor to our character but certainly not do honor to our understanding. So this conflict between the essential novelty of comedy, of all poetry, and the praise of antiquity we must naturally keep in mind.

Now from this speech<sup>55</sup> of the Clouds, it appears that the Clouds are much more reasonable than Socrates. They respect Zeus and Poseidon and the other gods, naturally. But very interestingly, even these prudent Clouds praise *ether* most highly. They complain that while they help the city more than any other gods, they are not worshiped at all. In other words, the Clouds themselves pursue a policy in that play. They are involved. Also, the Moon (capitalized) complains about the insufficient worship which it receives on the part of the Athenians and the allies of the Athenians. I cannot develop this as it should be developed. In other words: the Ether and the Moon in contradistinction with the other gods. Now we need a formula for that distinction. Some of you will have it ready, I’m sure. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** Cosmic gods.

**LS:** Very good. And the?

**Mr. Metzel:** And the—

**LS:** Olympian gods. So you know that<sup>56</sup> [from] the *Banquet*, Plato’s *Banquet*. Surely even in this speech of the Clouds, you know the Clouds are much more prudent than Socrates. This antagonism between the cosmic gods, the gods knowable to man as man and therefore recognized everywhere, and the Olympian gods, i.e., the specifically Greek gods also appears. Yes. Now in the meantime,<sup>57</sup> to repeat, there was nothing of<sup>xix</sup>—how should I say?—[a] crusade of Aristophanes, you know, to improve Athenian morality, but it was only a playmate for his comedy as comedy. While this was going on in the house, Strepsiades<sup>58</sup> underwent his IQ test on the part of Socrates. What was the result?

**Mr. Metzel:** He was not allowed to continue any further.

**LS:** No, I mean first of all, the factual statement—

**Mr. Metzel:** Oh, I have no—

**LS:** about the intelligence of Strepsiades.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Soc.:] Never by Chaos, Air, and Respiration,  
Never, no never have I seen a clown  
So helpless, and forgetful, and absurd!<sup>59</sup>  
Why if he learns a quirk or two he clean  
Forgets them ere he’s learnt them: all the same,

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<sup>xix</sup> There is a possible gap in audio here.

I'll call him out of doors here to the light.  
Take up your bed, Strepsiades, and come! (627-633)

**LS:** So what is the factual judgment about Strepsiades's capacity? He's extremely stupid. Ya. By the way, you see how nice this is with factual statements. You could of course say his IQ is— what would it be? Fifty? I don't know. Fifty. That's a purely factual statement, but if you know what you are talking about, you say in effect he's extremely stupid, if fifty is extremely stupid. Does anyone know? Or do they begin at one? Or at zero? I mean,<sup>60</sup> are there people with an IQ of zero?

**Student:** Fifty is extremely stupid.

**LS:** Is extremely stupid. I've heard of people who had one hundred thirty and one hundred forty, so I thought fifty must be pretty low. So but you see the beauty about factual judgments. An IQ of fifty: a numerical statement; nothing can be more objective. But every man<sup>61</sup> knows, as any of you all do know, that he's extremely stupid, which is a value judgment. Yes?

So<sup>62</sup> since Strepsiades is so stupid, Socrates does not even begin to teach him the higher part of his wisdom. That is important for the whole course of the argument later. Why?<sup>63</sup> Socrates's teaching consists of two parts: natural science and rhetoric. If I may use a modern analogy, which is of course very bad, but just for the moment: the humanities. He's too dumb for the natural sciences, but he's good enough for the humanities.<sup>64</sup> I mean, I tried to reproduce an opinion now widespread, which I am very far from sharing. So what does it mean for the meaning of the whole play? The antagonist of Socrates is someone who has acquired only the external, superficial part of Socrates's teaching, not the center and core of it. Would someone capable to understand that center and core ever have revolted against Socrates? Would Socrates ever have come into troubles through one of them, through a *true* student? As a matter of fact, we find the proof later. Even Strepsiades's son, Pheidippides, acquires only the external kind of knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and he refuses to participate in the burning down of the think tank at the end. All the more, someone who had really gotten the whole teaching. So the really foolish action of Socrates consists exclusively in not throwing out Strepsiades immediately. You know? That had all the consequences.

But let us go on. Socrates begins with the elements: with meter, rhythm, and so on. But Strepsiades is not interested in that. After all, if you want to deny your debts, you don't have to use meter for that. On the contrary, it might do you harm. Now, but still Socrates goes on in a certain teaching of this grammatical kind, and the first subject which he takes up is the correctness of names, the correct naming. And the main point, you remember what that was? It is perhaps not so clear from the translation. After all, we should have succeeded [in] making it clear. What is the point which he makes clear?

**Mr. Metzel:** The gender.

**LS:** Ya. In other words—

**Mr. Metzel:** The gender of the nouns.

**LS:** Yes. So the joke which he makes is this: there are quite a few Greek male names ending in *as*: Brasidas, Pendobidas, Epaminondas.<sup>xx</sup> Now they belong to the first declension, as we say,<sup>65</sup> and the first declension is generally speaking female, and it is shown in the vocative especially. But in other cases it sounds like a female name, and therefore these men whose names end in *-as* are really women, and all kinds of nasty jokes about contemporaries are made—you know, this guy is a woman for all kinds of reasons: he is a coward, or he is a homosexual, or whatever it may be. That's not the point. But there is a deeper thing, of course, behind it. Names, language, words: this is all conventional, all conventional that we call this "table" and the Greeks say *trapeza*.<sup>66</sup> I mean, it could be the other way around, as it were.<sup>67</sup> That depends merely on convention. So what Socrates is doing here is to try to bring about an approximation of convention to nature, so that the distinction between names of males and females should correspond to the distinction between grammatical males and grammatical females. In other words, it has something to do with the distinction between nature and convention of which I spoke before. Now Strepsiades also doesn't prove to be very bright here, and then he's asked to invent something regarding his own affairs. In other words, Socrates tries to stimulate his creativity (in present-day language) to do regarding his affairs what Socrates had been doing regarding the sun: to move around and to distinguish.

Now Strepsiades has only one problem, as we know: to get rid of his debts. What are his bright ideas to get rid of these debts? The first is to stop the moon, because the interest is due at the new moon. Now if the moon could be stopped, the day of payment would never arrive. Then<sup>68</sup> the other point is to use the sun in some way. It is not necessary for us to go into the details. And Socrates thinks these are not so bad ideas. But the last suggestion,<sup>69</sup> the simplest way of getting rid of his worries, is to commit suicide. [Some laughter] This is too much for Socrates. He gives up. Why he regarded the other possibilities [LS laughs], to stop the moon and to move the sun, as not absurd it doesn't appear, but there is a simple contradiction.<sup>70</sup> After all, he wants to be happy, and only because he wants to be happy is he now unhappy. By destroying himself he destroys of course all possibilities of happiness.<sup>71</sup>

The Clouds act again at this point because they are interested in Socrates's making some headway. Why are they interested in<sup>72</sup> Socrates's [making] some headway, by the way? They are very practical beings, you see. They are gods, goddesses, and no one worships them, no one in the whole world. And then they come to Athens, and here they find this sole man who worships them: Socrates. That is, Socrates is the first customer, we can say. You know? If Socrates's business becomes flourishing, they have an interest. So, really concerned with Socrates's success, they advise Strepsiades to send his son instead, you know, because Strepsiades is absolutely hopeless. Let us not forget this. Strepsiades is not and has never been a pupil of Socrates.<sup>xxi</sup> He has listened to a conversation of Socrates in which Socrates expounded to him his

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<sup>xx</sup> The three names actually mentioned by Strepsiades (line 686) are Philoxenos (which is a masculine name of the second declension), Melēsius, and Arynias. Brasidas was a distinguished Spartan leader during the early Peloponnesian War. Epaminondas was a famous Theban general and leader in the aftermath of the war, during Thebes' rise to independence and power. Pendobidas (if the audio is accurate) is unknown.

<sup>xxi</sup> Strauss echoes the response of many of those interrogated by Senator Joseph McCarthy and asked the question, "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?"

unbelief in Zeus and the other gods. That's all. The only one who has learned something from Socrates is Pheidippides, the son, and Pheidippides does not even *dream* of taking revenge on Socrates. So what Aristophanes says to Socrates is: Your downfall will not be your pupils, even those who have been pupils only of your rhetoric. The downfall, your downfall, will be the people who have heard you talking in general, your expressing to them your heterodox views. In this situation—and that confirms only what I have said before—the Clouds advise Socrates to please Strepsiades as long as his state of mind lasts. You see, they are practical beings. Socrates doesn't think of him, the Clouds think of him. If Strepsiades had been cleverer than he is, the whole thing would have worked well to the benefit of the Clouds, and at least without damage to Socrates.<sup>73</sup>

So Strepsiades's main problem now is to get his son, Pheidippides, to enter the school.<sup>74</sup> I mean, after this point, the *schooling* of Strepsiades is over. And as a matter of fact, he has not received any schooling. That's clear. And the schooling will be given to Pheidippides, and the trouble to Socrates comes indeed through Pheidippides's action towards his father later.

But we must stop here, because there are limits to everything. We will try to conclude our discussion of the *Clouds* next time, and hear perhaps Mr. Haight's paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted "be—."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "in which—."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "Aristophanes—."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "Socrates—."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted " , there is."

<sup>6</sup> Strauss says a few words to a student who will present his paper at the next session. These remarks have been deleted from the transcript.

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "What have the *Clouds* possibly—."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "to what extent."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted " , that is—."

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "according to—I mean"

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "in the dialogue—."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "to."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "as."

<sup>14</sup> Deleted "Not—."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "What's."

<sup>16</sup> Deleted "that."

<sup>17</sup> Deleted "And to the very extent—."

<sup>18</sup> Deleted "this—."

<sup>19</sup> Moved "other."

<sup>20</sup> Deleted "is it not—."

<sup>21</sup> Deleted "Is not—."

<sup>22</sup> Deleted "which are partly—."

<sup>23</sup> Deleted "it—."

<sup>24</sup> Deleted "the first—what he does is try—he tries to go—."

<sup>25</sup> Deleted "She was not exact—."

<sup>26</sup> Deleted "So,"

<sup>27</sup> Deleted "he say to—."

<sup>28</sup> Deleted "it—."

<sup>29</sup> Deleted "and."

<sup>30</sup> Deleted " , which is—."

<sup>31</sup> Deleted "The comic—."

<sup>32</sup> Deleted "what we can call Socrates' —."

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- <sup>33</sup> Deleted "He says—."  
<sup>34</sup> Deleted "you—."  
<sup>35</sup> Deleted "He initiates Socrates—."  
<sup>36</sup> Deleted "it to."  
<sup>37</sup> Deleted "Why do the Clouds—."  
<sup>38</sup> Deleted "They—."  
<sup>39</sup> Deleted "they're."  
<sup>40</sup> Deleted "That is presented to Strep—"  
<sup>41</sup> Deleted "something which—."  
<sup>42</sup> Deleted "and in—."  
<sup>43</sup> Deleted "the pudding—."  
<sup>44</sup> Deleted "'til."  
<sup>45</sup> Deleted "s."  
<sup>46</sup> Deleted "he."  
<sup>47</sup> Deleted "strikes—."  
<sup>48</sup> Deleted "we have now a new—."  
<sup>49</sup> Deleted "the one—."  
<sup>50</sup> Deleted ", being completely."  
<sup>51</sup> Deleted "is here—."  
<sup>52</sup> Deleted "are."  
<sup>53</sup> Deleted "You see,"  
<sup>54</sup> Deleted "That Aristophanes—and that is—."  
<sup>55</sup> Deleted "in—."  
<sup>56</sup> Deleted "in."  
<sup>57</sup> Deleted "by this same—."  
<sup>58</sup> Deleted "was—."  
<sup>59</sup> Deleted "Why, he forgets quirk or two, he clean forgets them e'er—."  
<sup>60</sup> Deleted "are those IQs begin with—."  
<sup>61</sup> Deleted "who."  
<sup>62</sup> Deleted "Socrates therefore does—."  
<sup>63</sup> Deleted "Strepsiades'—."  
<sup>64</sup> Deleted "That is, I believe, the judgment of—."  
<sup>65</sup> Deleted "and are therefore—."  
<sup>66</sup> Deleted "What—."  
<sup>67</sup> Deleted "There is no—."  
<sup>68</sup> Deleted "he—."  
<sup>69</sup> Deleted "is to get—."  
<sup>70</sup> Deleted "between—."  
<sup>71</sup> Deleted "because that's real."  
<sup>72</sup> Moved "making."  
<sup>73</sup> Deleted "Now we come to—."  
<sup>74</sup> Deleted: **Student:** "Oh, God. I didn't know." **LS:** "You see? That's, eh, there. It serves as, a kind of transition."



#### Session 4: no date

**Leo Strauss:** <sup>1</sup>Now let us turn to Aristophanes and the *Clouds*. I'll remind you of a few points we discussed last time. At first glance the *Clouds* present a conflict between what we would call science and the *polis*, and this is identical in the context with the conflict between immorality and morality. That science of Socrates is not political, or it does not include political or social science, because the theme of science is nature, and all political and social arrangements are conventional and therefore not the subject of science. But the Socratic science *is* connected with rhetoric, and why that is so we will see later. And the Socratic position is presented symbolically by the two gods whom Socrates worships: Ether, also called Vortex with a view to its function, and the Clouds. The Ether or Vortex stands for natural science, especially astronomy, and the Clouds stand for rhetoric, for the reasons we gave last time.<sup>1</sup> The highest part of Socrates's science is astronomy, and it is characteristic of Strepsiades that he is absolutely uninterested in astronomy, whereas for the other fields he has some slight understanding: for geometry he has a considerable interest because it is so important for dividing up the land.

Now this much about the overall position of Socrates. The occasion of the conflict is the predicament of Strepsiades. He is not a normal Athenian citizen; he is an in-between being, between the upper and the lower class by virtue of his coming, as you remember, from the lower class—he's a rustic—but he married, foolishly, into the upper class and therefore he is caught between the devil and the deep sea. But there is a more specific reason, apart from his marriage, and that is in his indulgence towards his son, because if he had been a tough father, he could have prevented the [debts]. His love for his son brings him into debts and tempts him therefore to become unjust, namely, to try to deny his debts, and this can only be done by becoming a completely unjust man via Socrates. Now Strepsiades, we have seen, is too dumb not only for natural science but for rhetoric as well. The Clouds advise Strepsiades to send his son Pheidippides to Socrates's school. The Clouds, the new gods, encourage an enterprise which is somehow directed against the old gods. You know, "Zeus doesn't exist," says Socrates.

Let us turn to verses 833 following, in the translation on page 184, middle, where Pheidippides speaks<sup>2</sup> to his father. Ya? Do you have that?

**Mr. Metzel:** Do you want me to read?

**LS:** Yes.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pheidippides:] And now you've come to such a pitch of madness

As to put faith in brain-struck men?

[Strepsiades:] Oh, hush!

And don't blaspheme such very dexterous men

And sapient too: men of such frugal habits

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<sup>1</sup> I.e., for their imitative qualities. See page 37 above (session 3).

*They never shave, nor use your precious ointment,  
Nor go to baths to clean themselves: but you  
Have taken me for a corpse and cleaned me out.  
Come, come, make haste, do go and learn for me. (833-839)*

**LS:** Stop here one moment. You see, there is a link between Strepsiades and Socrates, and that consists in the fact that both are thrifty, parsimonious. This parsimony is of course of very different origin. Why is Strepsiades parsimonious, and why is Socrates parsimonious? That we must see. You see, this parsimony is the *only* thing which Socrates and Strepsiades have in common, ya?, but all the more important, all the more revealing of the basic difference. Now what is the cause of Strepsiades's parsimony, and what is the cause of Socrates's parsimony? This is not a difficult question, but we must answer it.

**Mr. Metzel:** Socrates doesn't care for such things. They are of no worth to him. And they have too much worth for Strepsiades.

**LS:** In other words, in one case indifference, in the other case greed. They are really opposite motivations. And that is of course connected with the fact that Socrates is absolutely disinterested in the payment for his teaching. This we must always keep in mind. And therefore the vulgar notion of the *Clouds*, that Socrates is here presented as a sophist in the vulgar sense of the word, is simply not true, because the sophists were famous for greed for money and also for a reputation and prestige. Socrates is completely indifferent to these matters.

So Strepsiades then, as is indicated by the passage we have begun to read, is trying to persuade his son Pheidippides to become the pupil of Socrates because he, Strepsiades himself, is not intelligent enough for the purpose. In the conversation between Strepsiades and his son, Strepsiades teaches his son, without any preparation, that Zeus *is not*. Immediately, like that. And Pheidippides, as a sensible young man, regards this as madness.<sup>3</sup> He's willing to go to Socrates's school, but only in order to obey his father. The first time in his life that Strepsiades has put his foot down, and he got obeyed, which shows how terribly indulgent he has been hitherto. That brings that out still more. And the action is already indicated in this very fact: Strepsiades has been up 'til now a little crook. He only had the intention of defrauding his debtors. Then he goes to Socrates, and there the net result is that he becomes completely corrupted. He wants to become completely corrupted, but he does not imagine what he is letting himself in for. He had already accepted the abolition of Zeus as a minor thing, but he has no inkling [of] what is going to happen if his son is exposed to this influence. Pheidippides seems to have a premonition that the end would be very bad for his father, just as Strepsiades's indulgence to his son was bad for Strepsiades. In other words, he makes the same mistake in a different way—the father makes the same mistake all over again.

Now then they go both to Socrates, and Strepsiades urges Socrates to teach Strepsiades the two Speeches. How does he say? He calls them "Argument," or "Logic"—which is an impossible translation, "logic." The Right and Wrong Logic[s]. It has nothing to do with logic; they are two speeches, two contentions, two assertions, two arguments, we could perhaps say. A just argument—*just*, not logically correct—an assertion in favor of justice: that is called the "Just

*Logos*.” An assertion in favor of injustice, that is called the “Unjust *Logos*.”<sup>ii</sup> Now Strepsiades urges Socrates to teach his son the two *Logoi*, the two Assertions, but above all the Unjust *Logos*, naturally, because he wants to win the lawsuits by fair means or foul. Socrates says that Pheidippides will learn from the two *Logoi*, from the two Assertions themselves. Socrates will be absent. Socrates does not teach injustice—please note this—he only exposes these young men to these *Logoi*, to these arguments themselves. And if the Unjust Argument is stronger, it is not Socrates’s fault. That is so. This<sup>4</sup> appearance of these two *Logoi* is very interesting. The unjust teaching is not the teaching of Socrates. These teachings have a life of their own. They speak themselves; they act themselves. Now this is very common in the Platonic dialogues, that the *logos* is presented as having a life of its own. One extreme case, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates is afraid the *logos* might die. Ya? The *logos* might die. A *logos* moves as it sees fit, and we follow *it*. The *logos* is the leader and must move around. This is not a Platonic invention, as you can see. If it has been invented by anyone, one could say it has been invented by Aristophanes, who presents this movement of the two *Logoi*.

Now then we come to what is in a sense a central scene of the *Clouds*, namely, the argument between the two *Logoi*<sup>5</sup>—you can say between the two Theses if you want to, the Just Thesis and the Unjust Thesis; you cannot say the “Right and Wrong Logic,”<sup>6</sup> as Rogers translates. Two points which must be mentioned. The Unjust *Logos* is the weaker *logos* and the Just *Logos* is the stronger *logos*, and therefore the claim of Socrates is that he can make the weaker *logos* the stronger one, and vice-versa. Why is the Unjust *Logos*, the Unjust Thesis, called weak if it is so strong? And why is<sup>7</sup> the Just *Logos* called strong if it is so weak? There must be a reason for that. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** The Just is based upon emotional ties to tradition.

**LS:** What do you mean?

**Mr. Metzel:** It takes its strength from its listeners’ predilections and biases.

**LS:** Go on.<sup>8</sup> In other words, let us say it is strong with the *people* and the other is weak with the people. Perhaps that is sufficient; we must see. The argument begins, is started by the Unjust *Logos*, and its assertion is very straightforward and clear: Right, or justice, *is not*, just as Socrates had said: Zeus is not. Why is right not? Why does right not exist, according to the first argument?<sup>9</sup> Part of the argument is suppressed. Right obviously doesn’t exist with men—ya, read the daily papers. So if it exists anywhere, it will exist with the gods. But does it exist with the gods? No. The highest god is Zeus, and what is the ground of Zeus’s rule? By virtue of what does Zeus, the guardian of right, rule? It is stated here. Do you remember? It’s important for the whole following argument. What makes Zeus rule?

**Student:** Patricide.

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<sup>ii</sup> In Greek these speeches are, respectively, *Dikaïos Logos* (the Just Speech) and *Adikos Logos* (the Unjust Speech). Where Strauss refers to either or both of these speeches as dramatic personae and with the translations that he has deemed acceptable, their names have been capitalized.

**LS:** Parricide? Oh, yes. He bound his own father and he committed a most unjust action, so justice has no basis. You know that these points are—you must not take these as mere jokes. You know how important it is<sup>10</sup> [in] Plato's *Republic* that the new argument for justice, and an atrociously new argument, is necessary because the traditional notions of justice are based on traditional views of the gods, and these traditional notions contradict the very justice which they claim to support. So that is very serious. This in a way settles it. *The* highest authority for traditional morality contradicts traditional morality. What can you do? That the argument is very powerful is shown by the reaction of the Just *Logos*. The only reply of which it is capable are insults. But then the Just *Logos* goes on to say that the moral decay of the city is a consequence of the Unjust *Logos*. People's faith in right is destroyed by some naughty men pointing out the contradiction between traditional morality and the basis of traditional morality—the actions of Zeus. And that leads to the decay of the city. So that issue is not settled with that, and now it goes on.

Up till now we [have] had hardly more than scolding between the two *Logoi*, and we owe it to the Clouds, these powerful goddesses, that they bring about a debate as distinguished from mere exchange of insults. In a sense, the Clouds are more sensible than the two *Logoi*. They seem to be impartial and concerned with the true argument. And the Clouds<sup>11</sup> want to find out which of the two *Logoi* will be the best speaker. The question is: Can justice defend itself by *speech*? Justice might have a stronger case than injustice, but perhaps not in the element of speech. Is this thinkable, that something might be higher, truer, and yet not be able to defend itself in the element of speech? That is the question with which we are confronted here.

So the debate begins, and each of the two *Logoi* states its case. The Just *Logos* proves its case by praising the austere system of education of olden times, that system of education which led to the victory of Marathon. A parallel from this country would be the American Legion.<sup>iii12</sup> I say this without any criticism of it, but as something standing<sup>13</sup> for the recollection of the greatest achievements of the nation. Now what were the characteristic features of this old education? Physical training, gymnasium. Not prattling on the market place. Connected with that, sense of shame in every respect: the young are<sup>14</sup> seen but not heard, and this kind of thing. The new education makes what is base noble and makes what is noble base. A certain kind of impudence which was regarded as base by the old school is regarded now as a sign of courage and so on, and therefore regarded as noble. You see, the case is not between <sup>15</sup>an evaluating teaching and a value-free teaching, but in this modern lingo, two opposite systems of values confront each other.

Part of this modern and wicked system is, as appears from the indications, homosexuality. Now the Clouds, who are superhuman beings and therefore can be assumed to be more intelligent than we are, and therefore we must listen to how they react, the Clouds are impressed by what the Just Speech says. Up to now things are fine, but then the Unjust Speech comes up and contradicts everything <sup>16</sup>the Just Speech had said. He explicitly contradicts “quote the laws and right unquote,”<sup>iv</sup> meaning laws are as such bad; right is as such bad. Nothing short of that. And he boasts that he will win with the weak in spite of its weakness.

<sup>iii</sup> A wartime veterans' service organization.

<sup>iv</sup> *Clouds* 1040: *toisin nomois kai tais dikais* (*tananti' antilexai*). Strauss's translation.

There is however one common ground, and that is important, between the two Speeches. There is one thing which they praise equally, although the meaning is somewhat different, and that is manliness: *andreia*. And that is in a part of the argument in 1045 following, where the Unjust *Logos* shows that manliness is achieved precisely by the means condemned by the Just Speech. This is not very important for our purpose; the means happen to be warm baths. They were despised by the old-fashioned people and used by these new-fangled people. But the real power of the argument comes from the fact that the end is the same: manliness. And the argument is given by a Heracles, who used warm baths, and no one was as manly as Heracles. Throughout his speech,<sup>17</sup> the Unjust Speech appeals to precedent, Homeric and otherwise, which favors the new form of education. And this is of course of a certain general interest—and that is one of the weaknesses of what is called conservatism, if I may mention this complicated thing in passing. Conservatism always refers to tradition, but traditions are never unambiguous, that's the trouble. They are complicated, and you can find in every tradition some arguments against the overwhelming sense of the tradition. That's the difficulty, and that is where the Just *Logos* is caught. The Unjust *Logos* can find precedents in the traditions which favor the newfangled proposals.

But to come now to the main point, and where the opposition becomes very clear, the Unjust *Logos* rejects moderation or temperance. That's the key point. They agree as to the fact that manliness or courage is a virtue. But they disagree as to the status of moderation or temperance. Moderation, that is akin to a sense of shame. Moderation, temperance, sense of shame. This is regarded as a most important virtue by the old education and is regarded as a vice by the new education. There you are. Contemporary parallels abound. In the same breath in which he rejects moderation, he praises rhetoric. That goes together. This goes together, this cleverness in speech, this smartness, the flexibility over against the dignified inflexibility, adherence to principle and so on, in the old education. We can perhaps state it as follows also, and those of you who have studied Plato will know Platonic parallels to that. The virtues which are admired by the new type, by the Unjust *Logos*, are manliness and cleverness. Now the common Greek word for cleverness is the same as that for wisdom, *sophia*, because that is then a more subtle distinction, the distinction between wisdom in the stricter sense and cleverness. So let us say manliness and wisdom. For example, in Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, what are the virtues which he recognizes? Or Thrasymachus in the first book of the *Republic*? Manliness and wisdom combined. Justice and moderation are no virtues. The Just *Logos* puts a much greater store by moderation plus justice than on manliness and wisdom. But what is the basis?<sup>18</sup> We must go gradually to the deeper presuppositions. What is at the bottom of the rejection of moderation? Turn to page 193 of the translation.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Unjust *Logos*:] And then she cut and ran away! for nothing so engages  
A woman's heart as forward warmth, old shred of those dark Ages!  
For take this chastity, young man: sift it inside and out:  
Count all the pleasures, all the joys, it bids you live without:  
No kind of dames, no kind of games, no laughing, feasting, drinking,—  
Why life itself is little worth without these joys, I'm thinking.<sup>19</sup>

**LS:** In other words, that the old morality is austere, is *ascetic*. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[UL:] Well, I must notice now the wants by nature's self implanted.

**LS:** Leave it—"the necessities of nature," literal translation.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[UL:] You love, seduce, you can't help that. You're caught, convicted. Granted.

You're done for; you can't say one word: while if you follow me

Indulge your genius—

**LS:** Yes, that is not—"If conversing," or "being together with me." "You use" or "employ nature," where it says "indulge your genius." Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[UL:] laugh and quaff, hold nothing base to be.

Why if you're in adultery caught, your pleas will still be ample:

You've done no wrong, you'll say, and then bring Zeus in<sup>v</sup> your example.

He fell before the wondrous powers by Love and Beauty wielded:

And how can you, the Mortal, stand, where He, the Immortal, yielded? (1068-1082)

**LS:** Yes. In other words, the principle to which he defers is nature. The new morality is in accordance with nature; the old morality is against nature and is based only on convention: all themes which come up time and again in Plato. You see also the appeal to the model of Zeus himself. The old morality<sup>20</sup> condemns adultery, and adultery is a great crime. And the guardian of right is Zeus, but Zeus does accept these things which he condemns. But the argument is not quite sufficient. So granted then that one should follow nature without any regard to law or convention, still the law exists, and as appears from the sequel, there is human punishment for adultery in spite of the very strong case for adultery implied in Zeus's behavior. What about that? What about that great difficulty? Yes, someone who . . . the Unjust *Logos* is caught and punished. What's the argument? How can<sup>21</sup>—how do you call [it]: the Unjust *Logos* maintain his thesis on this basis? What would you say? The unnatural morality rules the law courts, and that is something.<sup>22</sup> So the Just *Logos* wins. But how can the Unjust *Logos* get around the law courts? Partly rhetoric; but still, rhetoric is not omnipotent. There is something else which we have to consider.

**Student:** Law courts are unjust.

**LS:** Okay. Yes, but they exist. And no one cares for justice here particularly. You know, justice loses face. But laws can be changed. As long as the citizen body believes in these conventions, of course<sup>23</sup> [they] are powerful, but the citizen body may change its mind; it may become enlightened, and then the laws will be changed. That's the end of it. Since these practices are based only on convention, i.e., only on opinion, a change of opinion destroys it. A change of opinion cannot destroy the fact that we must have food, for example: we may opine about it what we wish; we still need it. But things which depend entirely on opinion are changeable. At this

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<sup>v</sup> Rogers has "as."

point the Just *Logos* itself admits its defeat and goes over to the opposite camp. That is in a way the high point of this comedy, not Socrates. Socrates doesn't do anything. Justice itself, we can say, presents its case and is unable to defend it. Justice is there of course overthrown. Well, what do you say to that, to that argument up to this point? What was the meaning of this debate? What was to be established by this debate according to the Clouds who were in charge of the debate, and they brought it about, in a way? Was it to establish who is right or who is wrong?

**Student:** Who can win through speech.

**LS:** Who is the best speaker. Who is the best speaker. So the Unjust *Logos* has proved to be the best speaker. That does not prove that he is right. But let us assume, as I hope we all assume, that the Unjust Speech is wrong. Is it then not possible to state its case in *speech*? Must it not be possible to state the case for justice in speech? That is, by the way, the great theme of the *Republic*. The great theme: to state the case for justice in speech. According to Socrates, no one has ever done that before him. That is the first time. What is so strong, what is so difficult for speech to establish so that the Unjust *Logos* wins? What is that?<sup>24</sup> The subject matter discussed here . . . is adultery. Why is the argument in favor of adultery invincible, as it seems here? What does any argument against adultery presuppose? Really, that is very simple and we cannot go on before some of you have answered the question.

**Student:** Some kind of a hardship is involved with justice.

**LS:** That would apply also to theft and murder and any other case.

**Same Student:** Maybe just in terms of adultery.

**LS:** Ya, sure, because that was the subject. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** Let's say stresses which cause social disharmony.

**LS:** Ya, but if you look at it from a purely detached point of view, you can say it also establishes social harmony, and we begin to . . . adultery [laughter]. That . . . is too general.

**Student:** The sanctity of the family.

**LS:** Absolutely. Absolutely. That's the point. The sacredness of the marriage bond, as it were. But that is the question: Is this not the difficulty for the [Just] *Logos* to establish, that marriage is sacred, or, to use the term which is here more urgent because the basis of the argument is not sacredness but nature: Is marriage a *natural* institution? Is marriage by nature? That is the question. But we must see. We have not yet all the evidence together to see what the specific difficulty here is.

Now the decisive thing has been done. The Unjust *Logos* has proved to be stronger in speech than the Just *Logos*. Strepsiades is not deterred by this terrible event. He is as enthusiastic as he was before about his plan of having his son educated by the Unjust *Logos*. Imagine such a father.

His son on the other hand still does not like to stay in school. You see, Pheidippides, the foolish playboy, is more sensible than his father, his common father. How strange. Mr. Gildin?<sup>vi</sup>

**Mr. Gildin:** I don't understand. Why does the final overthrow of the Just *Logos* take the form of showing that everybody is an adulterer? Or is the translation misleading here?

**LS:** You mean the verse which we just read?

**Mr. Gildin:** At the very end, ya, where, "Who are they? They're adulterers. Who are they? They're adulterers."

**LS:** I see, yes. Well, now<sup>25</sup> surely that is a comic exaggeration, you know, playing to the audience. Ya? What kind of skeletons do you have in your closets? But stated noncomically, it simply means that if the citizen body does not believe in the wrongness of adultery—to them it is no longer [wrong]—they will not condemn [adulterers], and that is what I said. So if prohibition against adultery is based merely on opinion, then opinion can be changed by enlightenment.<sup>26</sup> Everyone who<sup>27</sup> takes the trouble of reading the chapter on American mores in de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and looks around sees that an enormous change has taken place in the last hundred years—I believe people who are better informed, say, in the last thirty years, and that shows what opinions can do. I mean what, for example, the spread of psychoanalysis has done to change the old position.

At this point the Clouds express for the first time the suspicion that Strepsiades or Socrates<sup>vii</sup> will regret what has happened before long. Since the Clouds are important characters in this play, why this change of opinion on the part of the Clouds? What has happened since their last approving remarks and encouraging remarks? Answer: the victory, the frank and clear victory of the Unjust *Logos*. The Clouds divine that the victory of the Unjust *Logos* is bound to have bad effects on everyone. If you turn to the translation, page 195, the speech of the Chorus there. Read that please.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Chorus:] Go: but in us the thought is strong, you will repent of this ere long.  
Now we wish to tell the Judges all the blessings they shall gain  
If, as justice plainly warrants, we the worthy prize obtain.  
First, whenever in the Season ye would fain your fields renew,  
All the world shall wait expectant till we've poured our rain on you:  
Then of all your crops and vineyards we will take the utmost care  
So that neither drought oppress them, nor the heavy rain impair.  
But if any one amongst you dare to treat our claims with scorn,  
Mortal he, the Clouds immortal, better had he ne'er been born!  
He from his estates shall gather neither corn, nor oil, nor wine,  
For whenever blossoms sparkle on the olive or the vine

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<sup>vi</sup> Hilail Gildin.

<sup>vii</sup> The Greek (l. 1114) is ambiguous regarding whom the Clouds address. "Go now" (*chōreite*) is a plural imperative, but "you will regret these things" (*soi tauta metamelēsein*) is grammatically addressed to a single individual.



They shall all at once be blighted: we will ply our slings so true.<sup>28</sup>  
 And if ever we behold him building up his mansions new,  
 With our tight and nipping hailstones we will all his tiles destroy.  
 But if he, his friends or kinsfolk, should<sup>viii</sup> a marriage feast enjoy,  
 All night long we'll pour in torrents: so perchance he'll rather pray  
 To endure the drought of Egypt, than decide amiss today! (1114-1130)

**LS:** The reference to Egypt is not uninteresting, because Clouds are of course powerless in Egypt. Egypt is watered by the Nile, [by] irrigation. It doesn't need the Clouds. The Clouds are powerless in Egypt, and which means, turned around: the opposite of the Clouds is most powerful in Egypt. What is that opposite to the Clouds, in the simplest formula?

**Mr. Metzel:** The river.

**LS:** Ya, but that does not correspond on the more practical level. The old, the ancient; and that is of course a theme which goes through Herodotus and Plato. The most ancient thing and the<sup>29</sup> greatest admiration for antiquity *as* antiquity is that found in Egypt. So you see, that I mention only in passing. But to come back to our point, the Clouds divine that the victory of injustice is bound to<sup>30</sup> have bad effects on everyone. The Clouds desire to win. Now that is on two levels. As goddesses, they desire to win recognition in Athens because now they are not recognized. As representatives of the play, they desire the poet to win. That is what they speak here. But they can win only if the judges are just, as they say at the beginning. But the judges will not be just if they do not derive profit from being just, if the Clouds cannot really give all these benefits which they represent here. And if they don't derive profit from being just through honoring the Clouds, and if they do not derive harm from being unjust, i.e., from not honoring or despising the Clouds. The Clouds naturally presuppose it is just to honor the Clouds. Ya? That's the basis of their argument. But the city of Athens, and hence the ancestral political and social order, does not honor the Clouds. Old Athens is unjust; therefore the Clouds must sympathize with the *Adikos* Thesis, with the Unjust *Logos*. Ya? Because the Just *Logos* doesn't recognize the Clouds as goddesses. That<sup>31</sup> shows the difficulty in which the Clouds are. The Clouds cannot wish a simple victory of the old school, because that doesn't recognize them. On the other hand, a simple victory of the new school would also not be good for them, and therefore they are in an ambiguous position which throws also some light on the problem of justice. One thing appears<sup>32</sup> which I would emphasize: the need—the Clouds see that it is necessary for anyone sooner or later to appeal to justice. Perhaps God knows why, but that is a fact. And therefore, *think*: don't believe so easily in those who say justice is a mere word.

So the issue is decided in favor of injustice, apparently. The consequence is that in the sequel, Strepsiades treats his creditors with incredible impudence because he is so absolutely sure that he can talk himself out of any debts. Pheidippides, his son, does nothing of the kind. That's quite interesting. And the argument against the creditors is not uninteresting. Let us turn,<sup>33</sup> in the translation, [to] page 200, bottom. That's verse 1278.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Str.:] Well then, tell me,

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<sup>viii</sup> Rogers has "would."

Which theory do you side with, that the rain  
Falls fresh each time, or that the Sun draws back  
The same old rain, and sends it down again?

Is that it?

**LS:** Ya.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Aminias:] Well,<sup>ix</sup> I'm very sure I neither—

**LS:** That's the creditor. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:** <sup>34</sup>[What?]

**LS:** The creditor. He calls him the creditor. Now what does the creditor say?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Am.:] I'm very sure I neither know nor care.

[Str.:] Not care! good Heavens! And do *you* claim your money,  
So unenlightened in the Laws of Nature?

**LS:** Yes, well that is not right. Ya: "How then are you right"; "do you have the right to claim money,/if you know nothing of the heavenly things?" Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Am.:] If you're hard up then, pay me back the Interest  
At least.

[Str.:] In-ter-est? what kind of a beast is that?

**LS:** Yes, the Greek word for interest, *tokos*, means progeny, and has therefore a certain ambiguity which it doesn't have in English. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Am.:] What else than day by day and month by month  
Larger and larger still the silver grows  
As time sweeps by?

[Str.:] Finely and nobly said.

What then! think you the Sea is larger now  
Than 'twas last year?

[Am.:] No surely, 'tis no larger:  
It is not right that<sup>x</sup> it should be.

**LS:** . . . Go on.

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<sup>ix</sup> Rogers omits "Well."

<sup>x</sup> Rogers omits "that."

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Str.:] And do you then,  
 Insatiable grasper! when the Sea,  
 Receiving all these Rivers, grows no larger,  
 Do you desire your silver to grow larger?  
 Come now, you prosecute your journey off!  
 Here, fetch the whip. (1278-1297)

**LS:** And so on. In other words, you see he is not quite stupid. He uses the rudiments of natural science which he has gained in order to prove the injustice of interest rates. That something should get bigger and bigger and bigger: there is no natural limit to that, whereas every natural being has limit. That is good. In this discussion with the creditors, as I say, Strepsiades is incredibly impudent, but it remains unclear, because other things happen now, whether Strepsiades would have gotten away with his impudence with the creditors—in other words, whether he would have won . . . in court.

At this stage, after this incredible conduct of Strepsiades, the Clouds are now absolutely opposed to Strepsiades. They know he can't bring them or anyone else any good, being such a fool. Now what is then the scene in which the whole thing culminates? To our great regret, we cannot know what would have happened to the debts. Something much graver than any question of debts comes in. Pheidippides beats his own father. Pheidippides, who hadn't taken any interest in winning lawsuits, in defrauding creditors, beats his own father, which according to all natural notions is a graver crime than some minor cheating. Strepsiades is obviously shocked by this fact. He tells the story [of] how he came to the beating. That you'll find on the top of page 204, in the middle of the speech of Strepsiades. They have a controversy about which poets are good or bad, and Strepsiades is in favor of the old classics, being an old-fashioned man, and<sup>35</sup> his son, his—how do you say?—sophisticated son, is in favor of the modern: Euripides. That's the context. Now what does he say?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Str.:] When he said this, my heart began to heave extremely fast;  
 Yet still I kept my passion down, and said, "Then prithee you,  
 Sing one of those new-fangled songs which modern striplings do."  
 And he began the shameful tale Euripides has told  
 How a brother and a sister lived incestuous lives of old.  
 Then, then I could no more restrain, but first I must confess  
 With strong abuse I loaded him, and so, as you may guess,  
 We stormed and bandied threat for threat: till out at last he flew,  
 And smashed and thrashed and thumped and bumped and bruised me black and  
 blue. (1368-1376)

**LS:** Ya, that's it. So in other words, the terrible thing which led to the beating of the father by the son is Pheidippides's defending incest, incest of brother and sister. Strepsiades abhors it. Pheidippides defends it. But the question is now no longer incest of brother and sister, but beating one's father. The Clouds encourage Pheidippides to defend why he's beating the father,

and then Pheidippides proves that a son may beat his father. He proves it to his father's satisfaction. That we must read. Page 205, verse 1408 and following.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ph.:] Peace. I will now resume the thread where I broke off.<sup>xi</sup>

**LS:** Yes.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ph.:] And first I ask: when I was young, did you not strike me then?

[Str.:] Yea: for I loved and cherished you.

[Ph.:] Well solve me this again,

Is it not just that I your son should cherish you alike,

And strike you, since, as you observe, to cherish means to strike?

What! must my body needs be scourged and pounded black and blue

And yours be scathless? was not I as much free-born as you?

“Children are whipped<sup>36</sup> and shall not sires be whipped?”

Perhaps you'll urge that children's minds alone are taught by blows:—

Well: Age is Second Childhood then: that everybody knows.

And as by old experience Age should guide its steps more clearly,

So when they err, they surely should be punished more severely.

[Str.:] But Law goes everywhere for me: deny it, if you can.

**LS:** Strepsiades appeals now to the *nomos*, to the convention. Whatever may be true or right by nature doesn't count. Conventional law forbids that everywhere. What does Pheidippides say?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ph.:] Well, was not he who made the law, a man a mortal man,

As you and<sup>xii</sup> I, who in old times, talked over all the crowd?

**LS:** You see? Like you and me, the legislator. He's no authority. He may be wrong. And in addition, he lived in the olden times, in the dark ages, in the benighted, so the chances that we know the truth are much better. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ph.:] And think you that to you or me the same is not allowed,

To change it, so that sons by blows should keep their fathers steady?

Still, we'll be liberal, and the blows which we've received already

We will forget, we'll have no ex-post-facto legislation.

—Look at the game-cocks, look at all the animal creation,

Do not *they* beat their parents? Aye: I say then, that in fact

They are as we, except that they no special laws enact.

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<sup>xi</sup> Rogers has “broke off before.”

<sup>xii</sup> Rogers has “or.”

**LS:** In other words, they have no conventions, no laws based on decisions. But otherwise they are what nature is. Pure nature we see much better in the brutes because they have no convention.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Str.:] Why don't you then, if always where the game-cock leads you follow,  
Ascend your perch to roost at night, and dirt and ordure swallow?

[Ph.:] The case is different there, old man, as Socrates would see.

[Str.:] Well then you'll blame yourself at last, if you keep striking me.

[Ph.:] How so?

[Str.:] Why, if it's right for me to punish you my son,

You can, if you have got one, yours.

[Ph.:] Aye, but suppose I've none.

Then having gulled me you will die, while I've been flogged in vain.

[Str.:] Good Heavens!<sup>xiii</sup> Good friends! I really think he has some reason to complain.

I must concede he has put the case in quite a novel light:

I really think we should be flogged unless we act aright! (1408-1439)

**LS:** Stop. In other words, just<sup>37</sup> as the Just *Logos* has admitted its defeat and has gone over to the opposite camp, Strepsiades, in his own case as a father, admits that his rebellious son is right. Let us consider the arguments brought forth by Pheidippides. "All men are by nature free. I was born as free as you. Hence every human being has the same right to beat another human being as anyone else has." Yes, sure, that is true, but what about a father and son? That is not just two chance human beings. Why does a father have the right to beat his son? Because he exercises his authority in the interest of the son. It's a form of caring; beating is a part of caring. And this beating and caring are connected with the fact that the son, as a child,<sup>38</sup> lacks understanding and the father possesses understanding. Yes, but if that is the reason, if the son is of age, has reached the age of discretion, and the father is stupid, perhaps even senile, then the son<sup>39</sup> may beat his father for the same reason. If lack of understanding is the reason for the objection, old men are frequently less wise than their children, and the children should beat them. Ya? If the only title to authority is intelligence, then the intelligent men must rule the unintelligent. And ruling is sometimes not separable from compelling, physically compelling, and that is beating. That's it.

Then the third argument which Pheidippides brings forth in reply to his father is [this]. Strepsiades has said: Yes, but there is a universal *nomos*, a universal law which favors the fathers' beating their children and not the other way around. Pheidippides says: Well, that *nomos* can be changed; that was made by some human legislator, a fellow like you and me. That just doesn't impress me. But if you speak of universal law, let us look at the true universal law, at the law which all living beings obey. Let us look at the cocks and at the dogs and what have you. And<sup>40</sup> the true universal law is that to which all living beings are subject, and these other living beings beat their fathers without any hesitation. Then Strepsiades gives a reply which is not too bad—perhaps the only sensible thing he's said hitherto, namely, man is not a brute. After all, he took the example of the cocks: You don't live like a cock; you differ from them in so many other

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<sup>xiii</sup> Rogers omits "Good Heavens!" and this exclamation is absent from the Greek as well.

respects. What does Pheidippides say on this occasion? What does he say? That's crucial because that is, as I said, the only sensible thing said by Strepsiades hitherto. What does he say?

**Mr. Metzel:** He appeals to Socrates.

**LS:** In other words, he doesn't give a reply. He defers to the authority of Socrates. So that is a point which we must keep in mind for not only today, but for every discussion of this subject: that we must consider in all such cases the specific nature of man. That was really the key point in the teaching of the revered Socrates, if I may use your phrase from last time. I mean, from Plato's and Xenophon's Socrates. Yes, but what does this imply, such a reference to the nature of man as distinguished from the nature of brutes. What does this imply?

**Mr. Metzel:** There is a difference: the difference . . .

**LS:** <sup>41</sup>Whatever the difference, however it might be defined, there is a difference, but what kind of a difference? What kind of a difference? That man is stronger than the brutes, or what? That's also a difference.

**Mr. Metzel:** Reason.

**LS:** <sup>42</sup>Yes, but what kind of a difference is this, when you refer to reason in this connection? You see, there are various differences. For example, there is a difference between this book—

**Mr. Metzel:** Man is capable of changing his actions.

**LS:** Yes, <sup>43</sup>well, it's not a good example. [Some laughter] Ya, well, let me do it very simply. What's the difference between this and this?

**Mr. Metzel:** Quantity.

**LS:** What?

**Mr. Metzel:** Quantity.

**LS:** Quantitative difference. A difference of *degree*. That's one difference. And then there is another kind of difference.

**Mr. Metzel:** Quality.

**LS:** Let us say essential difference. So in other words, what Aristophanes implies but doesn't spell out—that is what the later Socrates spells out—is that the whole case for justice cannot be made if we do not consider the essential difference between man and the brutes. And this more generally presupposes that there *are* essential differences, that there are essential differences. This is the decisive step taken. This simple sentence is the decisive step taken by Socrates. No one prior to Socrates spoke of essential differences. People implied them, but the very term “essential difference,” which everyone uses today, even our positivistic friends, all the time,

doesn't exist before Socrates. The discovery of the fact that there are essential differences presupposes that there are *essences*, whatever that may mean. And that was what Socrates did. And that is the problem to which Aristophanes, not understanding that properly, leads us.

**Mr. Metzel:** Except in the case where he judges Strepsiades, where has Socrates shown his interest in this man's nature?<sup>44</sup>

**LS:** Not at all. No, you are perfectly correct.<sup>45xiv</sup> —don't see the truth. They cannot see the truth. The truth is seen by the poets, to which Socrates, or Plato, replies: If the philosophers go about it in the right way, they and they *alone* see the truth, and they see it better and more clearly than the poets. That is a later story. Here we are still far removed from this kind of philosophy.

Then the last argument, the fifth argument, is this. Strepsiades says: If you accept beatings from your father, you acquire the right to beat your own son. That's a kind of chain going 'round. But to which Pheidippides replies: If I do not have a son, I have accepted the beatings from you, and I [will] never have an object which I can beat. That's unfair. I shall never have someone, you know, to pay back. This is good as far as it goes, but the really crucial argument is the fourth, which I mentioned before, to which Pheidippides doesn't have a reply. Beating is just a form of caring. I mean, otherwise it's just brutality. Hence sons must beat their fathers. Beating is an enjoyment of the beater at the expense of someone else. That's the implication of the last argument. Hence the beaten must have the right to beat his son. But if he has no son, then he must pay back. He can't go on in the chain. He must pay back. So that is of course . . .

Now what happens immediately thereafter? Let us read what happens immediately after, where we left off. But keep this in mind: Strepsiades admits that his son was right in beating him, and so the Socratic teaching, this immoral teaching, has won not only in the fight of the two *Logoi*, the two Theses, but<sup>46</sup> it has won again here. And now we come to the last step, the last straw, as you will see.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ph.:] Look to a fresh idea then.

[Str.:] And<sup>xv</sup> he'll be my death I vow.

[Ph.:] Yet then perhaps you will not grudge ev'n what you suffer now.

[Str.:] How! will you make me like the blows which I've received to-day?

[Ph.:] Yes, for I'll beat my mother too.

[Str.:] What! What is that you say!

Why this is worse than all.

**LS:** Yes. Now let's stop here. Here, that's out. Beating the father is all right; beating the mother is impossible. Now what is that? This is worse than everything else, and this is the last straw. And at this moment, that *alone* brings about the revolt of Strepsiades, nothing else before. The demise of the gods? No. Even beating the father, okay. But beating the mother? That's unbearable. How come? I read in one commentary a suggestion which flabbergasted me, namely, that this is connected with the fact that the mother is in this particular case such a fine lady from

<sup>xiv</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

<sup>xv</sup> Rogers omits "And."

the upper crust. And I think there is not the slightest reason to suppose that is true, because Strepsiades has long been cured of any admiration for his upper-class wife, as we have seen. So that can't [be the reason]. But what is then the reason?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ph.:] But what, if as I proved the other,  
By the same Logic I can prove 'tis right to beat my mother?  
[Str.:] Aye! what indeed! if this you plead,  
If this you think to win,  
Why then, for all I care, you may  
To the Accursed Pit convey  
Yourself with all your<sup>47</sup> learning new,  
Your master, and your Logic too. (1440-1451)

**LS:** Now let us stop here. Yes, Strepsiades absolutely refuses even to listen to the argument supporting the assertion that a son may beat his own mother. So<sup>48</sup> why is he so intransigent for the first time when this subject comes up, whereas he has always been open to reason up to this point? What's that? What is so wrong in beating one's mother? What is not wrong in beating one's father?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, there's a physical difference in strength, usually.

**LS:** Sure, but considerations of chivalry didn't play any role in that.

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, up to this point, in the last one—

**LS:** It's much tougher.

**Mr. Metzel:** He proved that he could beat his father because his father was weaker in reason.

**LS:** With all due respect to the fair sex, could not a mother also be inferior in understanding to her wise son?

**Mr. Metzel:** But I think this is<sup>49</sup> a difference—

**LS:** Or a wise daughter, for that matter? What?

**Mr. Metzel:** I think this is a difference which Strepsiades accords to women, and he doesn't expect them to be equal.

**LS:** You mean that he believes, generally speaking, that they are inferior intellectually to men, or what?

**Mr. Metzel:** That's what I would think.



**LS:** Well, all the greater reason for beating the mother. [Laughter] But why don't you take a daughter and her mother.<sup>50</sup> Then that would be simpler.

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, I think he has accepted this and then enshrined them anyway.

**LS:** Yes, now that won't do.<sup>51</sup> I mean, let us go back. Why did Pheidippides beat his father? Why did it come to that beating?

**Mr. Metzel:** Because he had been beaten.

**LS:** No, no. That was the reasoning later on, but why did it come to that beating? What disagreement between father and son led to the beating?

**Student:** Incest.

**LS:** Incest. And the incest issue was overlapped by the beating issue. Now the beating of the mother comes in. Yes? The beating of the mother comes up, and that reminds somehow and quite rightly of the incest issue before. If a son can beat his mother, where is the limit? May there not also be incest between mother and son? That is the point, and we must later on try to interpret it. But<sup>52</sup> let us first continue the external action. At this moment, after all communication, all discourse between father and son has been destroyed, Strepsiades complains to the Clouds that they have misled him. And they simply reject his accusation. They did what they did, they claim, in order to prepare Strepsiades's punishment so that he shall learn to fear the gods. Here they are rather hypocritical. He realizes that his original motive, to cheat his creditors, was wicked. He wishes to punish Socrates for having misled him. He can't punish the Clouds. His son Pheidippides, however, is grateful to his teacher Socrates and refuses to join his father Strepsiades in the action of revenge which follows and which consists, as you have seen, in burning down Socrates's think tank, *phrontistērion*, a term now applied in vulgar language to the Center of Behavioral Studies in Palo Alto,<sup>xvi</sup> but which is really a good literal translation for the term used by Aristophanes.<sup>53</sup>

Now we see what a crook Strepsiades really is. The alleged main reason why Strepsiades burns down the think tank is that Socrates commits acts of *hybris*, insolence against the gods, or that he is unjust to the gods, those gods whom *he*, Strepsiades, had sold down the river a long time ago and for whom he didn't care. He was reminded of the gods only when the *peak* of criminality, namely, beating one's mother, with its terrible implication came up. He had no objection to any injustice [done] to the gods until he saw the consequence of<sup>54</sup> beating one's own mother: incest with a mother. The implication: without gods, no effective prohibition against incest. And what does this mean for the play as a whole? We have seen that the crucial thing in the fight between the two *Logoi*, the Just *Logos* and the Unjust *Logos*, was that the Just *Logos* could not defend itself by speech, by *logos*, by argument. And the example there was adultery, and every argument<sup>55</sup> [against] adultery presupposes then that marriage is natural, a natural institution. We must link up this point with the end of the work. There is no *logos*, no reasoned argument, which can account for this prohibition against incest and therefore which can account for the sacredness

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<sup>xvi</sup> Strauss refers to the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, founded in 1954.

of marriage. There is an essential limitation of the *logos*, of reason.<sup>56</sup> But that does not settle the issue. Marriage is necessary. Prohibitions against incest *are* necessary. But<sup>57</sup> how can we account for these necessities? *Logos* appealing to nature, to *physis*, cannot account for that.

Let me first try to give a summary of the play—I mean the main points most important for our purposes. First, what is Socrates's position, and what light does it throw on the origin of political science, our theme here? Socrates is not the Socrates we know from Plato and Xenophon. He is a pre-Socratic, a student of nature.<sup>58</sup> And this implies that he is guided by the distinction between nature and the merely conventional, the merely arbitrary established by men, *nomos*. And from this it follows that he has no interest in political things as such, because political things are all based on *nomos*, on human arrangements which could also be different. The only interest which Socrates, this Socrates, can have in political things is to use the political things, such as law courts, for the purpose of what is by nature. The individual human being is a natural being. The *use* he can make of the political things is rhetoric. Therefore rhetoric is identical with political science. That's a phrase which Aristotle uses towards the end of his *Nicomachean Ethics*: that the sophists had practically identified political science with rhetoric.<sup>xvii</sup> That is the deepest reason for that. If all political things are convention, if they have the cognitive status of stamps, no serious adult would devote his life to the study of political things. I mean, you can do it as a hobby<sup>59</sup> as you can collect stamps, but no more. But still you can make some use of them for your benefit as a natural being. That's rhetoric.

Now this Socratic position is opposed to the old opinion, which is characterized by piety, moderation or sense of shame, and silent deed. The new education, akin to Socrates's teaching, is characterized by *hybris*—no fear of the gods, obeying nature, which in itself means dishonoring<sup>60</sup> [the gods], following one's inclinations, and cleverness in talk. Nothing is sacred since nothing sacred can withstand *logos*, the examination in the light of nature. The *polis*, city, has its base in the family, in the *oikos*. And what is the basis of the family? That's the theme here. A taboo, to use the modern term, a taboo which cannot be justified, which is just there. But could one not say that man needs the *polis* even if he does not need the family? Is not man so constituted that he cannot live except in society, even if it were true that he does not need the family? There is one great work which all of you have read and should which proposes this thesis: man needs the *polis*, but not the family. Do you know?

**Student:** The *Republic*.

**LS:** The *Republic*. That's the simple obvious theme of the *Republic*. Man by his nature is so constituted that he needs the *polis*, but not the family. The family is abolished. You see how close the themes of Plato are to those of Aristophanes. And needless to say that this is not Plato's last word on the family, because when Plato spoke practically on the subject, namely, in his *Laws*, [he observed an important connection between the family and the *polis*].<sup>xviii</sup> But Plato in

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<sup>xvii</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.9.20 (1181a).

<sup>xviii</sup> Strauss does not finish his thought here, but he clearly means to draw our attention to the contrast between Plato's argument in the *Republic* (the abolition, in the *polis*, of the family at book 4, 423e-424a and in book 5) and his remarks in the *Laws* concerning the family. For the latter, see especially *Laws*, book 3 (680c-683b, 690a).

the *Republic* discusses theoretically the problem of human society, and there he busts the case wide open and he is not afraid of very shocking things to say.

But what about the *polis*, then? Men must cooperate with one another if they are to live well. They are in need of exchange of goods and services, as no one can deny. But once you<sup>61</sup> admit such exchange, the need of such exchange, you must insist on that exchange being *fair*. People would stop exchanging goods and services if they knew all the time that they would always be cheated. Part of that is the law punishing men for defrauding their creditors. That's part of that simple fairness. So that would seem to be a good basis for justice. But what is the difficulty here? You see, they were very apt and did not leave one stone unturned. So why is not Socrates, Aristophanes's Socrates, compelled to admit the necessity of justice, since he cannot possibly deny the need for human living together, for human exchange, and therewith for justice? What's the difficulty here? It is a very terrible thing, but it must be said, and it is also necessary to say [in order] to show the essential deficiencies of all utilitarian argument, because that is a simple utilitarian argument. The fact that man must live in society and exchange goods and services, and therefore have a certain form of justice does not imply that *everyone* be just. Do we not have a wonderful exchange of goods and services though there is a lot of crime going on? We take that in our strides. We can afford it. Even a smaller and poorer society can afford some of this crime. A certain amount of clever injustice, of injustice which is invisible to the law courts and even to everyone else, is not destructive of the *polis*. Therefore the practical question is, for the individual: Will you be one of those privileged guys who can exploit the *polis* for his own selfish purposes, or will you be one of those average fellows who simply have to be just? The problem is discussed, as you know, in the *Republic*, at the beginning, especially when Glaucon describes this possibility of a man who is invisible and can do what he wants.<sup>xix</sup> That's the point. You see how the problems of Plato and the problems of Aristophanes are the same. So the Socratic position as presented by Aristophanes, which is not the position of Socrates we know from Plato, truly implies a denial of the essential necessity of justice.

Now let us see what Aristophanes's critique means.<sup>62</sup> I mean, there is a message of the play as a whole, a very simple one which everyone looking at it or reading it will see immediately. Well, what is it? I mean, Socrates has a teaching which is irrefutable, which is stronger than any other teaching, any other opposed teaching. Well? What happens? What happens? His teaching is so strong, stronger than any other. And?

**Mr. Metzel:** But it's not strong enough.

**LS:** Yes?

**Student:** The result of his teaching is to destroy the *polis*. That is, it destroys regulations of authority—

**LS:** That goes too far. Yes, but let—

**Same Student:** which would forbid Strepsiades from burning down the think tank.

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<sup>xix</sup> *Republic*, book 2, 359b-360d, the famed story of Gyges and the ring that granted him invisibility.

**LS:** Let us stick only to a part of what you said. The *doxa*, the opinion, of Strepsiades in this case is stronger than Socrates's *logos*. That is so.<sup>63</sup> Socrates is defeated. He's defeated. But this brings up another question, and I hope I will take care of the other part of your statement. If not, you remind me of it. Does this mean that Socrates is a *wicked* man? And that is, after all, the first impression one gets from reading the play. Does Aristophanes attack Socrates as an enemy of the *polis* and hence as an enemy of the human race? Socrates is defeated not by the *polis* but by Strepsiades. Not a legal action; Strepsiades doesn't . . . The character of Strepsiades shows the limits both of Socrates's effectiveness and of Socrates's being a danger and being himself in danger. Socrates has no effect on anyone except these starvelings who look at the stars together with him. The only noncognitive man—nonphilosopher, nonscientist, however you call it—whom he affects is Strepsiades. No one else. Strepsiades is a fairly innocuous crook, and it is an accident that he comes into connection with Socrates, and the accident is due to his in-between position between the upper and lower class, which may partly explain his unusual indulgence to his son. Only people like Strepsiades, this rather abnormal type of citizen, can possibly be corrupted by Socrates. One little implication, in passing: not types like Alcibiades. Not types like Alcibiades. That's very interesting. That is, such a simple type, not—you know, later in the accusation against Socrates much was made of what Socrates did to Alcibiades. Of course Alcibiades was still very young at that time, that's true.

Socrates's doctrine destroys not the *polis*—the *polis* is strong and firm—it destroys *him*, Socrates. Socrates's vice is not injustice, which has to do with greed, but lack of *understanding*. Socrates is, in a way, a *fool* in spite of his very great cleverness in measuring the jumping of fleas and in observing the motions of the stars. Well, you know sometimes even today you see famous natural scientists who are amazingly clever in their scientific work, and then they sometimes step out and make pronouncements on political matters, and<sup>64</sup> there they are not so impressive, to put it mildly. This is an old story, by no means limited to modern times. Socrates lacks *prudence* in the full sense of the word: practical wisdom. He lacks self-knowledge. He does not know; he's unaware of the context in which he operates his think tank. He's extremely shortsighted. He's a plaything of forces which he does not comprehend and [does] not control, presented here by the Clouds. The Clouds are not defeated. The Clouds are very clever. They want to enter Athens and be worshiped by Athens. There is only one little entering wedge, and that is Socrates, the fellow who dares: the innovator who is willing to worship new gods. So they bet on Socrates. But they are prudent: in the moment they see that Socrates's lack of understanding in cooperation with Strepsiades's lack of understanding is going to compromise the case of the Clouds, they switch sides. They come up as defenders of the *polis*. They are sitting pretty. Socrates is not.<sup>65</sup>

We must also mention the following point. Socrates, Aristophanes's Socrates, does not distinguish between the accidental and local laws, which are really rather arbitrary, and a law obeyed by all men, a universal law. A law which all human beings—that is, all civilized human beings—comply with is somehow natural, somehow based on man's nature. *Man's* nature. The essential difference between men and brutes is not considered by Socrates.

I mention one point in conclusion of this statement<sup>66</sup> to understand better the whole thing. Strepsiades and Socrates have something in common, naturally—otherwise they could not cooperate—and this was identified at one point of the play as parsimony, but an ambiguous

parsimony, because it means indifference in the case of Socrates and greed in the case of Strepsiades. Now<sup>67</sup> let us look somewhat more closely at Strepsiades. What is his motive? What is Strepsiades's ultimate motive? What sets the whole thing [off]? What causes the whole movement? What is his ultimate motive? Yes?

**Student:** Preservation of his own?

**LS:** That is very good. It is too good for my present purpose. Now I mean, first, obviously he's in debt. But what is behind the debts?

**Student:** Love of his son.

**LS:** Love of his son, yes? Love of his son. And he doesn't love his wife. The silence is very clear, and references to the wife do not show any love. But he loves his son, and that goes through his whole life. This love is not requited. As you put it, what his motivation is: love of his *own*, his son as love of his *own*. One can say the father and the son have nothing in common, except that Strepsiades is the father of Pheidippides. Strepsiades doesn't admire Pheidippides because of his horsemanship, because of the elegant company he keeps, and so on and so on and so on, but what is decisive for him is: This is *my* son. Ya? His own, nothing else. This is, one could say, a natural design which all brutes have, too: a tigress fights for her cubs as much as a human.

Now this natural love for his son as his own brings him into debts, into injustice, into impiety and so on and so on, and it culminates in this atrocious suggestion of his son that he may beat his own mother, you remember. Confronted with this possibility, Strepsiades's indulgence to[wards] his son ceases. Why? He grants his son everything: everything, even that he may beat him. But not that he may beat the mother, with the implication of incest. The prohibition against incest is the basis of his own, of Strepsiades's and any other man's own in this sense. Why? The sacredness of the family is indispensable in principle for Strepsiades's knowing that Pheidippides is *his* son. Strepsiades's natural love for this son as his own presupposes ultimately *nomos*, the law. And therefore his whole life is based on this self-contradiction.

Socrates<sup>68</sup> is presented there as without any love of any of his own, as you see. I mean, there's no allusion to his having children. Yes. So then that's different. I think that is ultimate[ly] the basis of the difficulty of Strepsiades. The question<sup>69</sup> to which we do not have an answer now is: Why does Aristophanes defend the family and the *polis*? He shows only that the defense by means of *logos* is not possible. There must be some other form of defense. That is the reason why we will turn—not now, unfortunately, but next time—to the *Birds*, because the *Birds* deals with the same problem, as we have seen.<sup>70</sup> Yes? *Birds* deals with the same problem. Have you seen that?

**Student:** There is a great variety of opinion as to what the *Birds* deals with. That's one thing.

**LS:** Yes, that is—I don't believe there is a great variety of opinion. I think, as far as I know the literature, there is one absolutely preponderant opinion, which tries to say that it is linked up with a certain political situation in Athens. Ya?

**Same Student:** Well, there are at least two variations on that.

**LS:** What would you say?

**Same Student:** Pardon?

**LS:** Perhaps you'll present to us. We will go to that. But I can only say what my impression has been for some time, that the *Birds* deals with an interesting proposition: to have a *polis* erected on the basis of Socrates—I mean, of Socrates's teaching. Let us see.<sup>71</sup> . . . I mean, don't give in to me in any way, of course. Follow your own understanding. But the theme of incest, beating the father, is written very largely, as you must have seen in the *Birds*.

**Same Student:** Yes, but the connection between the incest theme in the *Birds* and in the *Clouds* is a little bit obscure.

**LS:** Yes. We must try to make it clear. Now is there any point you would like to bring up now, with a few minutes left? Mr. Gildin?

**Mr. Gildin:** Are you suggesting that the reason the Clouds didn't put out the fire is because they changed sides?

**LS:** Yes, sure. They have changed, but before. Before that.<sup>72</sup> I mean, the first sign of the change of sides occurs after the victory of the Unjust *Logos*, and that is connected with [the fact that] they are practical beings. They know that if justice is simply rejected, that is bad for everyone. That they know. Yes, Mr. Johnson?

**Mr. Johnson:** I have a question about the youth of Aristophanes. If the given dates in the book are correct—about the youth of Aristophanes when the play was written—if the date that was given approximately for the birth of Aristophanes is correct, it would seem that he would be only about twenty-two years old.

**LS:** Who?

**Mr. Johnson:** Aristophanes.

**LS:** No, when was he born? See, I know about Socrates, but—

**Student:** They said 445.

**LS:** I don't think [so]. No, he must be older than that. The<sup>73</sup> [*Clouds*] was 421 or 422, or somewhere around there.<sup>74</sup> The *Birds* was much later, 414. No, he must be older than that.

**Mr. Johnson:** He must, because if this was the case it would seem kind of a strange criticism from a man so young of someone, Socrates, who was—

**LS:** No, so that was not [right]. I don't know what is supposed to be the date of the birth of Aristophanes, but I would assume of them there was no greater difference than about ten years, and some people are, how should I say, very mature at a very early age. We have some examples in very modern times. There is no difficulty in that.<sup>75</sup> But of course we cannot become entangled in the question of Aristophanes's own position, because we would have to read all the eleven plays, and that is absolutely impossible. We read<sup>76</sup> only with a view to an understanding of what Socrates, the revered Socrates, stands for, and here the statements of Aristophanes are particularly valuable. One could as well read Thucydides's history, for example,<sup>77</sup> for understanding the pre-Socratic thinking about society. But Aristophanes has a great advantage, that he speaks of Socrates himself, you know, and so we get<sup>78</sup> an earlier version of Socrates's teaching itself. And in addition, I think that there is no writer of this epoch, of the classical epoch, who was used so much by Plato as Aristophanes. One cannot understand the subtleties, and the most important subtleties, of Plato's *Republic* without having studied Aristophanes. There is one play which we cannot read for the simple reason that it is unavailable in the selection, and that's the *Assembly of Women*, which is quite clearly the model for Plato's *Republic*. The same theme: communism and equality of the sexes. As a matter of fact, there's a preponderance of the female sex. But abolition of the family: that is all there; and there are literal agreements between Plato's *Republic* and the *Assembly of Women* and so. We can't do that, because we must get some notion of what Socrates or Plato stand for. Now is there any other point you would like—er, Mr. Kendrick?

**Mr. Kendrick:** Why, in the beginning, do the *Clouds* mention Prodicus as also one of whom they approve?

**LS:** That seems to be so, that of all these famous sophists—I mean, the most famous of them were Prodicus, Protagoras, and Hippias. You see, one must make a distinction between the teachers of rhetoric and the sophists. That is not the same. For example, Thrasymachus is a rhetorician. Gorgias in the *Gorgias* is a rhetorician. That is not quite the same as sophist. But the three most famous sophists in Socrates's time were Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias; and Hippias was the most stupid of the three, and Prodicus apparently was the one whom Socrates respected most highly. That we know also from other sources. There was some connection.<sup>79</sup> Well,<sup>80</sup> [Prodicus] is frequently ridiculed,<sup>81</sup> surely, in Plato, but much less ridiculed than the others. So there must have been some connection between Socrates and Prodicus. And there is also some reference to that in one of the dialogues, I've forgotten which.<sup>xx</sup> There was some connection between the two. So Prodicus<sup>82</sup> apparently was sensible; but Prodicus's special preoccupation was correctness of words, you see, and that's also alluded to here in the *Clouds*. You know?

**Mr. Kendrick:** I was wondering if there was any connection between the choice of Heracles's story that Prodicus was famous for and the—

**LS:** Yes, that is Prodicus.

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<sup>xx</sup> While Prodicus is mentioned in several of the Platonic dialogues, it is likely that Strauss refers to the *Protagoras*, in which Prodicus is a character who appears to be friendly with Socrates. At *Protagoras* 341a, Socrates claims to be a student (*mathētēs*) of Protagoras, echoing *Meno* 96d. At *Hippias Major* 282c, Socrates refers to Prodicus as “our companion” (*hēmeteros hetairos*).

**Mr. Kendrick:** And this speech in here?

**LS:** In which way?

**Mr. Kendrick:** The choice of Pheidippides as it were being a comic substitute for the choice of Heracles.

**LS:** I don't get it. Well, for those who do not know as much as Mr. Kendrick knows, I would like to say the choice of Heracles, that's the story told by Socrates in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, where Socrates presents a case for virtue in the form of a story of the choice of virtue by Heracles, ya?, and this goes back to Prodicus.<sup>xxi</sup> I think there is a reference to Prodicus there. Ya, Prodicus. Now all right, but I don't see—I mean, Heracles chooses virtue against vice. Ya? And what does Pheidippides do?

**Mr. Kendrick:** He chooses the Unjust Speech.

**LS:** I see. In other words, that would be Xenophon's reply: that Socrates teaches just the opposite as what he's made to teach here. That makes some sense. Yes, but there is a more—

**Mr. Kendrick:** I notice that the reference to Heracles, the use of Heracles in the Unjust Speech seems to point at that connection, too.

**LS:** That's possible, yes. But there is a more obvious connection, and that is that in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*: the hero, the perfect gentleman incarnate, Ischomachus, uses literally a verse from the *Clouds*, something which Pheidippides says in the *Clouds*, you know: "Roll the horse and bring it home."<sup>xxii</sup> Ya? Page one. Sure, there are some connections. There's no question.<sup>83</sup> Surely, very generally speaking, and that is a fact that is very general and very simple, is this: that Plato and Xenophon turn it around. Socrates, so far from being a defender of the Unjust Speech, was the first to set forth the virtues of the Just Speech. Ya? Generally. But that is a bit too simple because, as I indicated last time, the case for rational morality which Socrates makes is not a case simply for traditional morality. Certain things are changed, yes? Certain things are changed. Not because Socrates was a wicked man, but there is a problem in traditional morality.

So next time we will hear your paper—

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted: "...papers. I have given a paper to Mr. Strickland, the first half of Plato's *Apology*. And Mr. Strangheger and Mr. Frock, are still waiting for their papers. Now, one of them must take the second half of the *Apology*, and one of them must take the *Crito*. First come, first served. And we understand..."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "to Socrates—."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "He does go—."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "—that is very—the."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "between the two—."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "as this—."

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<sup>xxi</sup> *Memorabilia* 2. 1.20-34.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Clouds*, l. 32. Strauss's translation. For the reference in Xenophon, see *Oeconomicus* 11.18.



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<sup>7</sup> Deleted “the strong *logos* called strong—.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “, can.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “There is an—.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “—Plato in the *Republic*—.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “, they expect—they.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “Or some—.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “for the greatest—.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “heard but not seen—.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “an evaluating morality”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “the previous”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “the other Speech—.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “of the—.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “But I must—.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “preaches—.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “How can—.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “it.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “The argument is—.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “that—I mean.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “By—well I—you—.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “reads—.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “that—.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “most—.”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “effect—.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “is—.”

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “only to—.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “to page—.”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted “Hmm?”

<sup>35</sup> Deleted “his new—.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “and sires—.”

<sup>37</sup> Deleted “as the Unjust—.”

<sup>38</sup> Deleted “is—.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “must beat—.”

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “there is—.”

<sup>41</sup> Deleted “However—.”

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “Yes, that.”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “that’s—I mean—.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “, in his—.”

<sup>45</sup> Deleted “Socrates was—is—.”

<sup>46</sup> Deleted “it is—.”

<sup>47</sup> Deleted “new—.”

<sup>48</sup> Deleted “that what—.”

<sup>49</sup> Deleted “a—in—.”

<sup>50</sup> Deleted “, and that is—.”

<sup>51</sup> Deleted “What—.”

<sup>52</sup> Deleted “let us first—.”

<sup>53</sup> Deleted “The alleged main reason—.”

<sup>54</sup> Deleted “that—.”

<sup>55</sup> Deleted “in favor of.”

<sup>56</sup> Deleted “, and therefore—.”

<sup>57</sup> Deleted “where do we see—.”

<sup>58</sup> Deleted “in the—of nature.”

<sup>59</sup> Deleted “like—.”

<sup>60</sup> Deleted “them.”

<sup>61</sup> Deleted “have such—.”

<sup>62</sup> Deleted “What is—.”

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- <sup>63</sup> Deleted “This—.”  
<sup>64</sup> Deleted “so, and.”  
<sup>65</sup> Deleted “We can also—.”  
<sup>66</sup> Deleted “—what is—.”  
<sup>67</sup> Deleted “let us look a bit more closely—.”  
<sup>68</sup> Deleted “, who.”  
<sup>69</sup> Deleted “is—.”  
<sup>70</sup> Deleted “that.”  
<sup>71</sup> Deleted “I mean,.”  
<sup>72</sup> Deleted “They have changed—.”  
<sup>73</sup> Deleted “*Birds*.”  
<sup>74</sup> Deleted “The *Clouds*.”  
<sup>75</sup> Deleted “And that, I think—but we must try to—.”  
<sup>76</sup> Deleted “it.”  
<sup>77</sup> Deleted “Thucydides’ history.”  
<sup>78</sup> Deleted “a first—.”  
<sup>79</sup> Deleted “Socrates—.”  
<sup>80</sup> Deleted “he.”  
<sup>81</sup> Deleted “but he is,.”  
<sup>82</sup> Deleted “was—.”  
<sup>83</sup> Deleted “Plato and Aristotle—.”

## Session 5: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —[In the second part of your] remarks, beginning with your reference to Gaunt, you retracted what you had said in the first part.<sup>i</sup> But that is perfectly intelligible; you simply are doubtful. You are attracted by the political interpretation, but you are also doubtful whether it works. I do not blame you for that, and it will certainly not dispense me from a brief discussion of this . . . issue.

You have said there has always been the tendency to present Aristophanes as a political playwright. “Always”: What does that mean? Since Aristophanes’s time? Or since the early nineteenth century? As far as my knowledge goes, since the early twentieth century. And that gives the whole thing a different complexion. It has something to do with tendencies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, peculiar to these centuries, to put this emphasis on the political. Now on the other hand, if one says instead of “political,” a playwright, one does not necessarily improve the situation? Because what is a playwright? A playwright today and a playwright in the fourth or fifth century is an entirely different thing, and one would have to<sup>1</sup> raise the question: What is a play? What is a drama? What is a comedy, in particular? I will turn to that later.

In the first part of your speech, you said the political plays—and political in the narrow sense, topical affairs of the moment—in all ten plays, with the exception of the *Birds*.<sup>ii</sup> That is of course not true. What about the *Plutus*? What about the *Assembly of Women*? What about the *Clouds*? What about the *Thesmophoriazusae*? That is not so. Allusions to contemporary things occur everywhere, even in the *Birds*, as we have seen . . . Yes?

**Student:** I was speaking rather fast, and possibly I said what I did not mean to say, but I did not mean political in the narrow sense of allusions to contemporary events. I meant—I believe I said specifically political or social, or political in the sense that it was used in Greece, meaning social. And I think—

**LS:** Yes, but<sup>2</sup> excuse me, if that is not contemporary politics, as the Sicilian expedition in 414, I don’t know what it is.

**Same Student:** I’m sorry, I didn’t understand—

**LS:** I mean, you tried to link up<sup>3</sup> the *Birds* and the Sicilian expedition. That is surely contemporary politics at that time. So that is what I meant. I mean, what does “political” mean if it is not political as contemporary politics? Then you would have to say, for example, an historical play—when Shakespeare writes his histories, he presents a political problem in a way

<sup>i</sup> Strauss responds to a student’s paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

<sup>ii</sup> There are eleven surviving comedies of Aristophanes. Strauss interprets the student’s claim to be that ten of these plays are “political,” while the *Birds* is the lone exception.

which has no immediate, or at least not immediately visible, connection with the contemporary politics of Elizabeth and James.

**Same Student:** I would prefer a comparison not to Shakespeare but to, say, Bernard Shaw, who does not necessarily refer to immediate—

**LS:** Yes, but the example you gave—

**Same Student:** contemporary events, but just the same, I think he can be called a political playwright.

**LS:** Perhaps. I don't know. But something is surely true in the case of Shaw. But I would like to come to a broader issue. Now when you say the *parabasis* of the *Birds* is nonpolitical, and nowhere else, that's not true. The *Clouds*, for example, as we have seen, is entirely nonpolitical.

**Same Student:** I did not mean, and don't think I said, that *all* the others were political. In fact, not all of them are; I think only about four or five of them are political. All I meant to say was that in this case, this is assuredly not political.

**LS:** Yes, but the others—the *Clouds*, and the *Thesmophoriazusai*, and the *Ecclesiazusai*, and the *Plutus*—are as surely in that simple sense not political. One point I would like to mention only immediately: whatever may be difficult regarding the name of that city founded in the *Birds*, it surely has a connection to clouds. Aristophanes wrote a play called the *Clouds*, which would already indicate that there might be some connection there, to say nothing of other considerations.

But let me put the question<sup>4</sup> [on] a broader basis. I said<sup>5</sup> the general tendency of critics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to emphasize the political character of the plays is connected with the spirit of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the prevalent spirit: a prejudice which we can call a political prejudice, and which finds its most well-known expression in Marxism: that you have to understand a work of poetry, ultimately—that alone can give you true understanding—in terms of the political-social problems of the time. And we have seen traces of that, and this is of course not limited to Marxists, but only Marxism is the most well-known and extreme form of that.<sup>6</sup> For example, the emphasis which people put<sup>7</sup> [on] the interpretation of Plato's political works, the *Laws* and the *Republic*, on his affairs in Syracuse. There were centuries, millennia of Platonic interpretation and no one had paid any attention to Plato's affair in Syracuse. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Syracusan affair became so famous that it overshadowed the substantive issues of the Platonic dialogues. I'm sure that one can understand the *Republic* and the *Laws* as a whole without any difficulty, without even thinking of Plato's adventure or misadventures in Syracuse.<sup>iii</sup> When Plato, who after all was interested in politics, as we know, presented Aristophanes in one<sup>8</sup> of his dialogues, in the *Banquet*, there is hardly any allusion to Aristophanes as a man being concerned with politics, much less than other

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<sup>iii</sup> Strauss refers to the narrative of Plato's *Seventh Letter*, the authenticity of which is heavily disputed. In this letter, Plato recounts his involvement in a period of political upheaval and infighting in Syracuse between his friend Dion and the king Dionysius II, for the sake of whose education Plato had been invited to Sicily.

characters he presents there, like Pausanias. So<sup>9</sup> there is to begin with no extraneous evidence, at any rate, in favor of the view that Aristophanes should be emphatically political. Surely politics occurs everywhere, but the question is: Why? The safest thing to start from is that Aristophanes's works are all comedies. No one can deny that. Now<sup>10</sup> what is the purpose of the comedy, according to what Aristophanes himself says?

Now he says that the poet should make man, the citizen, just; to be a teacher of justice. But that would apply, of course, to every dramatic poet. That's not characteristic of the comic poet. What is the comic poet to do, in addition to being a teacher of justice? I think everyone ought to know that, but I want some one of you to say it. What is a comedy, a comic poet, supposed to do, today and at all times? And we have Aristophanean evidence to this effect: that he wants to bring about this well-known effect of comedy.

**Student:** Make people laugh.

**LS:** Make people laugh. Sure. The ridiculous as ridiculous is the theme of comedy. Now then of course a long question arises: What is the ridiculous? Now let me take a slight[ly] roundabout way. Ridiculous means very different things for different people. You know that very crude and vulgar people find laughable things which more refined people do not find laughable at all, and vice versa. Now if we take now the two extremes, the grossly ridiculous and the subtly ridiculous, what is the primary theme of the comedy as Aristophanes meant it, the grossly ridiculous or the subtly ridiculous? The primary theme, the most obvious theme?

**Student:** The grossly ridiculous.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** The grossly ridiculous.

**LS:** Sure. Because it is after all a popular presentation, where all males at least could be present. Sure. So the grossly comic, the indecently comic. Now indecency in Greece, as well as in our time, at all times,<sup>11</sup> has to do with sex, but not only with sex strictly understood, but also with other affairs of the body which are not mentioned in decent society which have to do with the digestive process, to which many references are made in the Aristophanean comedies. But then there is something else. Again, I appeal to a common experience. I made this experience first in another country, but I believe you could make this experience also in this country—and the ladies must forgive me for the slight indelicacy of this story, but it is really not unimportant. There is a very vulgar place where people of the male sex express indecencies, and these are public toilets. Now in public toilets you find two forms of indecency most common, at least in another country, but I believe in given conditions could also be in this country. First, of course, gross sexual indecencies. But the second, that is much more interesting: political obscenity. Political obscenity. In Germany, where I had the occasion to observe this, what you saw: all the inscriptions you found in such places were either Nazist or Communist, never of the respectable parties.<sup>12</sup> And you know, in our present language we<sup>13</sup> speak of the political obscenity. That is not a bad usage, in any case.

What Aristophanes stands for politically was of course the view<sup>14</sup> of the nice people, of the gentlemen; there's no question about that. You know, the squires. But this was the unorthodox politics in Athens at that time. [LS taps on the table for emphasis] This was not—I mean, all the leading men, the famous men—Pericles, Cleon, Lamachus, whoever they may be, even Nicias—<sup>15</sup>the respected men in the foreground: they were all ridiculed, and in a way in which they could not well be attacked outside of this privileged sphere of the comic stage. That is still true to now. Bodily obscenity; so to extend it beyond sex, that's one thing. The bodily ridiculous, that's one thing, the politically ridiculous is another. But<sup>16</sup> there are at least two other great themes which characterized all Aristophanean comedies apart from politics and sex. There are two other themes which are treated in an indecent, in a ridiculous manner. Yes?

**Student:** Religion.

**LS:** The gods. Yes, the gods. Blasphemy goes through the whole . . . plays. And blasphemy is another form of obscenity, indecency. And then there is a fourth subject which is treated to some extent improperly, indecently, and we had a good example last time. We will also see some specimens of that, important specimens of that in the *Birds*. But there is also another play, a grossly indecent play, by the way, the *Thesmophoriazusae*—I don't know how to translate that title<sup>iv</sup>—in which Euripides is presented in a most ridiculous fashion. Let us call it, using a word employed by Aristophanes himself, wisdom. Wisdom. And of course wisdom has various forms. There is this kind of wisdom which is represented by Socrates. There is also the wisdom of the poets. And what Aristophanes presents especially in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, for example, is the wisdom of Euripides. Now to mention just one point, externally and at first glance,<sup>17</sup> [Aristophanes] is for the old-fashioned, in favor of the old-fashioned, and Euripides is a new-fangled poet. And the opposite number is Aeschylus—you know, the venerable poet of the *Persians*, and so on and so on. And there is a play<sup>v</sup> in which Aristophanes presents a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides which ends<sup>18</sup> externally in its action in favor of Aeschylus against Euripides, but on a purely external political ground: Who is willing to accept Alcibiades, Euripides<sup>19</sup> [or] Aeschylus? And only Aeschylus is willing to accept it, and so he gets a prize—not on grounds of the superiority of his poetry. There is one third great tragic poet who does not enter the contest at all, and that is the noble Sophocles. And Aeschylus talks like Billingsgate,<sup>vi</sup> and so does Euripides. In other words, they are all—Aeschylus too is presented indecently. The only one who could not be presented indecently was Sophocles. That's a compliment to Sophocles.<sup>20</sup> I mean, the word “indecent” is a bit harsh and I shall retract it, but I have to use [something like] it.

The theme of Aristophanes is the *ridiculous*, and the ridiculous in the most important and most powerful forms, and these are the<sup>21</sup> four things which I have mentioned. One could go into that, and should go into that, more deeply and see how these four themes which I mentioned—politics, sex, gods, and wisdom—are connected with one another. That would be a true understanding of Aristophanes, but if one would succeed in understanding their intrinsic relation,

<sup>iv</sup> The simplest translation would be *The Women of the Thesmophoria*. Thesmophoria was a festival celebrated by Greek women in honor of Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, and her daughter Persephone.

<sup>v</sup> The *Frogs*.

<sup>vi</sup> Billingsgate: a large fish market in east London.

then one would have understood the Aristophanean comedy. You see, the problem of the Aristophanean comedy is quite different from that of the Shakespearean comedy, or that of Molière or Plautus or whoever you might think of. But this is surely the problem: the political plays a part, and a very important part, because it is as massive and as massively obvious to everyone as sex. But to say it is more important to the Aristophanean comedy than “quote sex unquote” would be wrong. One would have to understand this relation and what we had been discussing last time in this question of beating the father, which is a relatively decent way of putting the question of the foundation of the family, the foundation of the household: the question of incest, which is a point where obviously the *polis* and its laws need that institution which has the primary purpose of procreation.

Now this much in order to indicate the general approach which I believe is absolutely necessary: surely one must beware of any generalization. One cannot possibly start from a general notion of comedy of which one does not know whether it is applicable to Aristophanes. One has<sup>22</sup> to listen to Aristophanes himself. And Aristophanes, in contradistinction to the tragic poets, speaks in the *parabasis* in his own name, and so we have it really straight from the horse’s mouth. What does he want to do? And there are two claims or three claims which come up all the time. One is the teacher of justice;<sup>23</sup> [two], to make people laugh; and three, that he has novelties—what now would be called “creative”: that he has conceived a new conceit, conjecture which no one had before. That is the basis for the beginning of any possible understanding.

Before we turn to the *Birds*, I would like to say a few more words about the *Clouds*, which I believe would help a bit for the understanding of the *Birds*. I remind you of the main point: a man is made aware of the badness of injustice or impiety in the *Clouds*. We have to raise two questions. First, what kind of a man, or what is the motive of his injustice; and<sup>24</sup> [second], how is he made aware of the badness of it? Now this man is Strepsiades, and his chief concern is love of his son *as his own*; and this love of his son is stronger than his love of right or justice, or his love of the *polis*, because right and justice and *polis* are in a way equivalents. There is a difficulty, because the *polis* demands subordination of one’s own, of love of one’s own, to love of the common—of the *koinon*, which is the common, even the sacrifice of one’s own to the common. The clearest case of course is war. This very difficult story in Genesis about Abraham and Isaac, where a man is commanded to sacrifice his only son, whom he loves, and that’s a very difficult and profound story. But purely humanly speaking, part of the story is the problem of the community and the individual, which demands that of every father for his son in a war. And only the battles bring this problem back to the most radical formulation. Good.

Now this love of one’s own by itself, taken merely by itself would lead to unconcern with right or justice. And it leads therefore to a questioning of justice, and this is brought out by the discussion between the Just and the Unjust Speech, in which the weakness of the Just Speech is revealed. The ultimate consequence of this tendency is the acceptance of the son beating his father and his mother and, more radically stated, of incest. But this would render impossible that a man could say of a younger man: He is *my* son. So Strepsiades’s own, and love of his own, is itself somehow based on the *polis*, on the *nomos*, on the law which he contradicts. Strepsiades would not contradict himself if he did not respect the prohibition against incest. He would not have gotten into trouble if he had acted like his own son, Pheidippides, who did not have a son

(you remember that?) and did not passionately love his son. Pheidippides remains consistent after his conversion. Strepsiades cannot remain [so].

The crucial question is: What precisely constitutes the weakness of the case for justice? Answer: In the first place, the contradiction between the rules of justice and the conduct of *the* guardian of justice, Zeus. You remember, Zeus binds his father, Zeus commits adultery: things which he forbids to men.<sup>25</sup> Ya? What do you say to this argument? One could say, some people would perhaps say: Well, these were Greek myths, and therefore Greek morality had the great misfortune of being built on myths which contradicted Greek morality. But<sup>26</sup> what is the reason *in* the myths? Were these myths mere brutal facts of Greek lives? Was there not some human thought invested in these myths? Now if we assume that, we see immediately what the reason is. The guardian of right, the founder of the order of right, is not subject to the right which he founds—the problem with which you are all familiar in a much more restricted form from the modern doctrine of sovereignty. The ultimate maker of the law can also unmake the laws. The founder cannot be subject to his *nomos*, to his law. And therefore those subject to the law can only obey the legislator. They must not think of imitating the legislators. If we return to the language of myth: men must obey the gods but must not imitate the gods. That is one point which is there.

But the whole argument up to this point<sup>27</sup> is based on one presupposition: the rules in question—let us simply say the prohibition against incest and all its implications—that they are merely by virtue of law, by virtue of establishment, by virtue of say-so. But is the family, the *oikos*, which stands and falls by the prohibition against incest, not manifestly natural or rational? That is the question. Now what is implied in the argument of Socrates, or his Unjust *Logos*, regarding the natural character of the family? What is implied? Or if you want to take the simpler example of beating one's father, it would appear there. Is it not so that a society stands and falls by paternal, or at least parental authority, bringing up the children who are completely unable to take care of themselves, who do not know right and wrong, black and white, left and right? Well, let us again look at the Bible, because the fundamental problems are of course always in there. Let us look at incest in the Bible. Do you remember some stories of incest there? How is the procreation of the human race possible in the early age, assuming that all men descend from one and the same couple, except by incest at least between brother and sister, to say nothing of the story of Lot and his daughters, and so on? Think also of the story of Oedipus in Greece.<sup>28</sup> I mean, you remember this story. What would be our moral judgment about Oedipus if we were suddenly confronted with such a tale in our world?

**Student:** We would say that he was blameless, that it was chance.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** That he was blameless.

**LS:** Why?

**Same Student:** Chance.



**LS:** Yes, but more precisely, why is he blameless?

**Same Student:** Well, that's the rule of Thebes, but—

**LS:** No, no. I mean, why would we say Oedipus is blameless?

**Student:** He does not know.

**LS:** He did not know. Yes, but the deeper implication of the myth is, of course,<sup>29</sup> incest is a terrible violation of a sacred order *regardless* of whether you know or not. That is the point. And there is something behind it, that this has by itself terrible sanctions. For example, the offspring must be terrible. Now look at the offspring of Oedipus and Jocasta. There is at least one exception to that rule. At least one; I think there are two. Well, if Antigone is not a noble woman, I don't know who is, and even her sister Ismene. So there is a problem. What is the basis for the prohibition against incest? Is this a rule which is universally valid? *Universally* valid? And the mere fact that it depends on knowledge is a very great point. The conclusion? We cannot say much more, because Aristophanes in the *Clouds* leaves it at a few indications. The foundation of the *polis* is the household, and the foundation of the household is the prohibition against incest. This is the sacred prohibition, not a utilitarian rule. And the sacred foundation of all society cannot be defended by the *logos*. There is a conflict then between the *polis* and the *logos*. Now this thesis in itself is today trivial. It is only usually not brought out, but it is implied in what you learn in almost all classes in this building. How would we people call today such things as the prohibitions against incest or beating one's father, and similar things?

**Student:** Rules.

**Student:** Conventions.

**Student:** . . .

**LS:** "Conventions" are rarely said today. They have this—

**Student:** Taboos?

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Taboos?

**LS:** Taboo,<sup>30</sup> yes, comes a bit closer. But I think the two terms which would invariably occur in such a discussion would be "myths" or "values." Now what does official social science teach regarding myths or values? That every society stands or falls by a value system or by a basic myth, and that this value system or myth cannot be defended rationally. I mean, every defense would be merely ideological. It can only be accepted or rejected, but it is not subject to rational validation. So this premise is really very venerable today.<sup>31</sup> I mean, a simple reader—and we all must always return to the stage of a simple reader if we want to understand such a work—what if—I limit myself entirely to Strepsiades now—Strepsiades *ought* to have loved justice and the

*polis* more than his son. That is what we would all say, I think, as decent people. But still, why? This question must be permitted in the classroom, if not in the marketplace. Why should he have loved justice and the *polis* more than his son? Mr. . . . ?

**Student:** The love of his son is ultimately dependent on justice, according to the play.

**LS:** Yes. Because the *polis*, we can say, is the condition of his family. He could not have a son, as his son, without the *polis*. Ya, but that is of course not precise enough, because the air also is a condition of his son, and one can't say a man should love the air more than his son. So we must be more precise. The *polis* is a condition and<sup>32</sup> is much more than a mere condition. Yes?

**Student:** The *polis* is a condition which would not be present if men didn't somehow or other work to preserve it, which is not true of the air as a condition.

**LS:** Ya.

**Same Student:** Therefore it is more important that men love the *polis*, because if they didn't, it would be destroyed, where this isn't true of the other condition.

**LS:** That is good. But I think it is a tiny little bit too analytical for me now, although I'll keep it in mind. What comes first to sight, prior to any analysis, is the connection between the *polis* and right or justice. Strepsiades ought to have loved the *polis* more than his son because the *polis* is the embodiment of right or justice. That is the higher claim of the *polis*. All human dignity depends on political society.<sup>33</sup> That is elementary. The whole argument of Plato and Aristotle presupposes this at every point. Here a question arises, which we as theoretical men are compelled to raise: Is this *true*? Is the *polis* the embodiment of right? In the moment we raise this question, we understand the beginning of the *Birds*, because at the beginning of the *Birds* we see two Athenians leaving Athens because Athens is not the embodiment of justice. Provisionally, before going into any details, we can say two Athenians leave Athens in quest for a just city, for a city which is truly an embodiment [of justice]. That is the same problem as in the *Republic*, as you know. They seek justice and they know that justice has its home in the *polis*, can be seen more clearly in the *polis* than in the individual. All right, they are in a *polis*. Look at Athens. No, Athens has many flaws. Sparta, even Sparta has many flaws. And any city of which they know has many flaws. So they have to *found* a just city to see how justice really looks.<sup>34</sup> Something of this kind is implied in the *Birds*.

And now let us turn to the *Birds* itself. Two Athenians: one is called Euelpides and the other is called Peisthetaerus. Euelpides, that is derived from the words "men of good hope." The man of good hope. And Peisthetaerus is the "reliable comrade." Reliable comrade, something of this kind. They follow two birds. To follow birds means, of course, in Greek (also the same word) obey two birds. You see,<sup>35</sup> really the play opens with the rule of birds. Birds were famous *omina*. You did what the birds told you to do. So it begins with the rule of the birds already. And they are on the quest for a human being who has become a bird. They run away from the city of Athens, which makes life unbearable because of the constant lawsuits (a theme which we will find also in the *Wasps* from a different point of view). And they seek a place where they can live quietly, a city which is not a busybody, a city of busybodies. By the way, you see also here some

connection with the *Republic*, because in the *Republic*, the definition of justice given there, justice means minding one's own business. That is only a different formulation for being not a busybody, in ordinary language. A man who is minding his own business, he is the opposite of a busybody. So they seek a city which is not a busybody. And they don't know whether such a city exists, but they think they can find out the location of it from this man who has become a bird, Tereus. Why such a man, such a creature: now a bird, once a human being? Because being a bird and flying around all countries, he might have seen it from above, a kind of aerial reconnaissance, you see. And since he is of human origin, he will understand these humans, so that he is chosen with absolute sensibility.

Having almost despaired of finding their way, they discover that they have arrived at the place where Tereus lives. What first comes to sight is a servant bird of Tereus, a slave bird. And that's strange, because we will see there are no slaves there. But we hear immediately that this fellow has a slave bird only as a relic from his human life. This was his human slave in his human days. The birds have no slaves. Once they see this strange bird, they get frightened, and they let their birds escape so they can't find their way back. The way back to civilization is closed. They have to find a way to live where they have arrived finally. Let us turn to verse 85 following, which is on<sup>36</sup> page 8 of the translation. Ya, go on.

**Reader:**

[Euelpides:] O dear! O dear! my heart went pit-a-pat,  
My daw's gone too.

[Peisthetaerus:] Gone? O you coward you,  
You *let* him go!

Is this the place?

**LS:** Ya, ya, sure.

**Reader:**

[Eu.:] Well, didn't you fall down,  
And let your crow go?

[Pei.:] No, I didn't. No!

[Eu.:] Where is she then?

[Pei.:] She flew away herself.

[Eu.:] You didn't let her go. You're a brave boy! (86-91)<sup>vii</sup>

**LS:** Yes, now this little interlude is not uninteresting. They did exactly the same thing. Out of fear they let them fly, but they put different constructions on the same action. Who is cleverer of the two fellows from a very simple point of view, Peisthetaerus or Euelpides?

**Student:** Peisthetaerus.

**LS:** Ya, sure. Now that is the first indication that he's the hero, you see, at this point . . . He's cleverer. That's the first indication.

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<sup>vii</sup> Strauss calls upon a different student to read the passages here; the reader is no longer Mr. Metzel.

Now Tereus,<sup>37</sup> the Hoopoe, has become completely a bird now. And at this place also, we should read on page 9, bottom, in the translation. They are asked, what do they come [for]? They are human beings, of course, the two men from Athens. Now go on.

**Reader:**

[Eu.:] You were a man at first, as we are now,  
 And had your creditors, as we have now,  
 And loved to shirk your debts, as we do now;  
 And then you changed your nature, and became  
 A bird, and flew round land and sea, and know  
 All that men feel, and all that birds feel too.  
 That's why we are come as suppliants here, to ask  
 If you can tell us of some city, soft  
 As a thick rug, to lay us down within.  
 [Hoopoe:] Seek ye a mightier than the Cranaan town?

**LS:** That's Athens, yes.

**Reader:**

[Eu.:] A mightier, no; a more commodious, yes.  
 [Hoo.:] Aristocratic?  
 [Eu.:] Anything but that!  
 I loathe the very name of Scellias' son.  
 [Hoo.:] What sort of city would ye like?  
 [Eu.:] Why, one  
 Where my worst trouble would be such as this;  
 A friend at daybreak coming to my door  
 And calling out *O by Olympian Zeus,*  
*Take your bath early: then come round to me,*  
*You and your children, to the wedding banquet*  
*I'm going to give. Now pray don't disappoint me,*  
*Else, keep your distance, when my money's—gone.*  
 [Hoo.:] Upon my word, you are quite in love with troubles!  
 And you?  
 [Pei.:] I love the like.  
 [Hoo.:] But tell me what.  
 [Pei.:] To have the father of some handsome lad  
 Come up and chide me with complaints like these,  
*Fine things I hear of you, Stilbonides,*  
*You met my son returning from the baths,*  
*And never kissed, or hugged, or fondled him,*  
*You, his parental<sup>viii</sup> friend! You're a nice fellow. (114-142)*

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<sup>viii</sup> Rogers has "paternal."

**LS:** Yes, now let us stop here.<sup>38</sup> In this comical and rather gross thing, the translator was very decent. Now what do we learn from that?<sup>39</sup> What do we see here about the motivation of the two men?<sup>40</sup> What do we learn? I mean, common as well as the differences. What do they seek? I mean, nothing aristocratic—see, that’s very important, and that is one part of the truth, that it is a democracy which they seek, but not such a troublesome democracy as Athens. A pleasant democracy. That is clear. A pleasant democracy. But there is a slight difference between the tastes of the two fellows.

**Mr. Metzel:** The first wants an easy material life.

**LS:** Yes.

**Mr. Metzel:** He wants to get the necessities of physical existence through no effort of his own.

**LS:** Yes, you know, he wants to get things from others, ya, and doesn’t want to do anything for them.<sup>41</sup> That is what some people say the welfare state is. But of course he doesn’t think of the welfare state, but [it is] just a very convenient [example]. That is presented more clearly in the *Assembly of Women* and in another way in the *Plutus*, you see, a city where men have every little abundance. That is what . . . But what is Peisthetaerus interested in?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, he doesn’t want bread and circuses. He wants an existence free from the moral strictures of others.

**LS:** This is very delicate, what you say, but we cannot afford an extreme delicacy in a matter of such importance.

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, he—this is a—

**LS:** What is his taste?

**Mr. Metzel:** He’s a pederast, as far as—

**LS:** Sure, sure, sure.<sup>42</sup> So that’s important. This is a clever pederast. That is not unimportant, because if the question of the household comes up, and the family, that includes the prohibition against pederasty itself according to the Greek view, too. That’s an irregularity. But here we see a problem. And<sup>43</sup> when Plato presents Aristophanes in the *Banquet*,<sup>44</sup> Aristophanes is presented as giving an edge to the pederasts, yes, to say nothing of other things.

Now then Tereus proposes a maritime city and, at the request of Euelpides, Greek cities. The proposals are all turned down. No human city will do, of which they know. And then Euelpides asks: What about the life with the birds? We don’t have to live with humans, after all. And then Tereus praises the amenities of birds’ life: they need no money, and so on. At this point, Peisthetaerus comes to the fore, and then he will be at the center for the rest of the play. He comes to the fore with a big scheme: the *birds* should found a city. Found a city. They will not go on in a nonpolitical life as hitherto.<sup>45</sup> Euelpides didn’t go higher than that. Peisthetaerus says they must have a *polis*. And he adds one more thing which is absolutely crucial: they should

form a *single* city. The democracy sketched here is a *universal* democracy, of birds. A universal democracy. So no one should say that the notion of a universal state was wholly unknown prior to the time of the Stoics or anyone else. Then what sort of a *polis*?

Now let us read on page twelve of the translation, verses 180<sup>ix</sup> to 193, to which Mr. Haight had referred, because they are really crucial. That is Peisthetaerus speaking; the long speech of his, the relatively long speech of his. Yes?

**Reader:**

[Pei.:] What did you see?

[Hoo.:] I saw the clouds and sky.

**LS:** Do you see, “the clouds,” yes? Which we know already. Yes?

**Reader:**

[Pei.:] And is not that the Station of the Birds?

[Hoo.:] Station?

[Pei.:] As one would<sup>x</sup> say, their habitation.

Here while the heavens revolve, and yon great dome

Is moving round, ye keep your Station still.

Make this your city, fence it round with walls,

And from your Station is evolved your State.

So ye’ll be lords of men, as now of locusts,

And Melian famine shall destroy the Gods.

[Hoo.:] Eh! how?

[Pei.:] The Air’s betwixt the Earth and Sky.

And just as we, if we would go to Pytho,

Must crave a grant of passage from Boeotia, <sup>46</sup>

Even so, when men slay victims to the Gods,

Unless the Gods pay tribute, ye in turn

Will grant no passage for the savoury steam

To rise through Chaos, and a realm not theirs. (*Birds*, 178-193)

**LS:** Yes. Let us stop here<sup>47</sup> and we will comment. Now what kind of a *polis*? And surely a pun is made, but any pun worth being written down must be more than a pun. It is an etymological thing, in the first place. *Polis* . . . *Polis* [LS writes on the blackboard] comes from—and this is of course wholly unfounded as a serious assertion—*polos*; and *polos* means an axis, an axis primarily. Pole, the two poles, is derived from the primary meaning, axis, the pivot on which anything turns, and therefore derivatively the axis of the celestial sphere, and then finally the celestial sphere itself. What does this mean, this joke? The *polis* of the birds is the key *polis*. It is not a chance location which has these or that advantages and hence also disadvantages. It’s the key *polis*. Its site is the bond between heaven and earth, between gods and men. It is *the* place, the locus, fit for universal rule, for the rule not only over men—that’s not universal—but over gods as well. The best *polis* cannot be on earth. Does this<sup>48</sup> ring a bell? Forgive me for bringing

<sup>ix</sup> The student begins reading at line 178.

<sup>x</sup> Rogers has “should.”

up these anticipatory questions, but that saves us time later on. The best *polis* cannot be on earth. Did you ever hear that?

**Student:** The end of the *Republic*.

**LS:** End of the ninth book. Somewhere—the model is “laid out in heaven.”<sup>xi</sup> Now here it is not exactly in heaven; it is between heaven and earth, but still it is a reminder. Now<sup>49</sup> anticipating a later expression, but lest we miss a point: when we speak today of ideal, of an ideal city, we don’t speak in the language of the Greeks. There is no Greek word for “ideal.” The Greek word is the city according to nature.<sup>xii</sup> Now that means also its place must be by nature most fit for a perfect city: and that place is in the air, the bond between heaven and earth. Tereus is enthusiastic about the clever conceit, and he is willing to found the *polis* together with Peisthetaerus, provided the other birds agree, naturally. I mean, he’s only a constitutional king, you can see, and he demands therefore that Peisthetaerus explain to the birds the new scheme. Now it is clear Peisthetaerus is *the* man, *the* hero. We learn in passing also that he’s an old man—that comes up time and again<sup>50</sup>—who<sup>51</sup> [is] an inventive man of novel thoughts, who attempts novel deeds, something unheard of.

Now it is not easy to get all the birds together. It is also not easy to convince them that the two human beings are not their enemies. After all, they know them only up to now as bird hunters. The birds wish to rend them to pieces. Now let us turn to the translation, page eighteen, bottom, verses 339 [and following]. [They] are in real danger. The birds wish to rend them to pieces, both. Yes? And then Euelpides says? Do you have that? “You alone.” Do you have it?

**Reader:**

[Eu.:] “Wretched man, ’twas you that caused it—”

**LS:** Yes.

**Reader:**

[Eu.:] you and all your cleverness!

Why you brought me I can’t see.

[Pei.:] Just that you might follow me.

[Eu.:] Just that I might die of weeping.

[Pei.:] What a foolish thing to say!

Weeping will be quite beyond you, when your eyes are pecked away. (339-342)

**LS:** Ya, let us stop here. We learn one point. The real instigator from the very beginning was Peisthetaerus. So Euelpides is a secondary figure. They can be compared to such couples as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in *Don Quixote*, or perhaps also to Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson. You know, they are the famous couples: the clever leader, a bit strange (even Sherlock

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<sup>xi</sup> *Republic*, book 9, 592b.

<sup>xii</sup> It is unclear which passage in particular Strauss has in mind here. In the passage from the *Republic*, Glaucon (592a) uses “in words” (*en logois*), and Socrates (592b) uses, as Strauss points out, “model in heaven” (*en ouranō . . . paradeigma*). See however 473e.

Holmes is very strange, as you know), and a normal man who has faith in that superior, extra- and abnormal man.

**Mr. Metzel:** In the *Frogs* also?

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Metzel:** In the *Frogs* also? That couple.

**LS:** I don't believe that's [the same], but I don't know.

**Mr. Metzel:** Dionysus—

**LS:** Yes, Dionysus is a god. I mean,<sup>52</sup> [his] superiority is given in that, yes? That's a different point.

The name Peisthetaerus, by the way, what does the name mean? His name indicates reliability: *pistos*. Perhaps he is<sup>53</sup> so reliable, so unusually reliable, because he's so unusually clever. That could be an explanation; I cannot swear this is the case. Let us turn to the top of page 20, where Euelpides says, "You most wise man." Do you have it?

**Reader:**

[Eu.:] What a skillful neat contrivance! O you clever fellow you,  
In your military science Nicias you far outdo! (362-363)

**LS:** Yes. Now that [is], again, only to show the position of the two men. Euelpides recognizes<sup>54</sup> [Peisthetaerus's] ascendancy without any hesitation, and a bit later on, on the same page, Euelpides speaking again. Do you have it?

**Reader:** No. I don't see where Euelpides speaks again on that page.

**LS:** No, it is Epops.<sup>xiii</sup> I'm sorry. "If they are by nature enemies, they are—." He tries to sell the two Athenians to the birds' assembly, and says they are by nature enemies, because men and birds are by nature enemies, but as regards their minds, they are friends. Do you have that?

**Reader:**

[Hoo.:] Enemies, I grant, by nature, very friends in heart and will;  
Here they come with kindly purpose, useful lessons to instill.  
[Chorus:] What, they come with words of friendship? What, you really then  
suppose  
They will teach us useful lessons, they our fathers' fathers' foes?  
[Hoo.:] Yet to clever folk a foeman very useful hints may show;  
Thus, that foresight brings us safety, from a friend we ne'er should know,  
But the truth is forced upon us, very quickly, by a foe.  
Hence it is that all the Cities, taught by foe, and not by friend,

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<sup>xiii</sup> Tereus, the hoopoe.



Learn to build them ships of battle, and their lofty walls extend;  
So by this, a foeman's, teaching children, home, and wealth defend. (371-380)

**LS:** Yes. So in other words, this is a very good political point. Ya? You see that he perfectly imitated a deliberative debate, ya?<sup>55</sup> That's appeasement, the birds say. And then they're given a very good political argument: You can and must learn from enemies. Now we learn in this sequel [that] the birds were barbarians until some time ago, Tereus had said. They still believe in the ancestral enmity to their natural enemies, and the birds have to be enlightened. That is a problem: they are ordinary citizens with an ordinary citizen's prejudice. They have to be liberated from that. Page 22, top, 418.

**Reader:**

[Ch.:] "But wherefore is he come?"

**LS:** Yes.

**Reader:**<sup>56</sup>

[Ch.:] What is it

He seeks to compass by his visit?

Think you he's got some cunning plan

Whereby, allied with us, he can

Assist a friend, or harm a foe?

What brings him here, I'd like to know. (416-420)

**LS:** You see, again, a perfectly natural distrust. He's a foreigner, an enemy from another *polis*. He must have some selfish advantage, and therefore his selfish advantage cannot be ours. They behave absolutely like this.

Now after more preparations, into which we cannot go, Peisthetaerus makes his speech in verses 465 following, which is in the translation, page<sup>57</sup> [23], bottom. And let us read a few of these verses, at the beginning of Peisthetaerus's—<sup>xiv</sup>

**Reader:**

[Ch.:] —I never had heard it before!

[Pei.:] Because you've a blind uninquisitive mind, unaccustomed on Aesop to pore.

The lark had her birth, so he says, before Earth; then her father fell sick and he died.

She laid out his body with dutiful care, but a grave she could nowhere provide,  
For the Earth was not yet in existence; at last, by urgent necessity led,  
When the fifth day arrived, the poor creature contrived to bury her sire in her head.

[Eu.:] So the sire of the lark, give me leave to remark, on the crest of an headland lies dead.

[Pei.:] If therefore, by birth, ye are older than Earth, if before all the Gods ye

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<sup>xiv</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

existed,

By the right of the firstborn the sceptre is yours; your claim cannot well be resisted.

[Eu.:] I advise you to nourish and strengthen your beak, and to keep it in trim for a stroke.

Zeus won't in a hurry the sceptre restore to the wood-pecker tapping the oak.

[Pei.:] In times prehistoric 'tis easily proved, by evidence weighty and ample, That Birds, and not Gods, were the Rulers of men, and the Lords of the world; for example,

Time was that the Persians were ruled by the Cock— (470-483)

**LS:** And so on. We don't have to read that. The main point is this: How does he convince the birds? By asserting, and in this way proving, that in the oldest times the rule of the universe belonged to the birds and not to the gods. You see, that's again very political: he has a novel scheme,<sup>58</sup> something which never existed before, but politically that can be accepted only if it is proven to be in harmony with tradition, as we would say. "But here in old times, [they say] if it is really the *oldest*." The most revolutionary must be a restoration of the oldest. That is, that it is not a restoration of the oldest is perfectly clear, because the birds never ruled. And even in this case we see the birds can't rule: they need a human to rule them. But as a political argument, the birds, having the ordinary citizens' spirit, can only be convinced of their right by [it] being proven that their rule was the oldest.

Originally, birds ruled everything, and especially all men. Different birds ruled the Persians, the Greeks, and the Egyptians-Phoenicians . . . a division of mankind which you may know from Herodotus. It is, however, not quite clear whether each bird ruled one province or whether they ruled all men jointly. That is not quite clear. The birds are persuaded that they ought to recover their kingship. One universal *polis* is established:<sup>59</sup> a universal democracy. But<sup>60</sup> of course it has a ruler. That's the difficulty: it has a [ruler] from a different species in Peisthetaerus. But otherwise, a democracy. But how will men be induced to recognize the birds as gods? And how will the birds be able to supply men with riches? And that of course must be clear, and that must be done to the satisfaction of everyone. Worship of the birds would be much less expensive than worship of the gods: you don't have to bring those expensive sacrifices, and other arguments of this nature.

Peisthetaerus becomes the ruler of the birds. Let us look at page 31, lines 3 to 6 from bottom: "What one must do with strength," yes?

### **Reader:**

[Ch.:] So all that by muscle and strength can be done, we Birds will assuredly do; But whatever by prudence and skill must be won, we leave altogether to you. (637-638)

**LS:** Yes. That, I think, is clear. Peisthetaerus is the ruler. Well, there are certain *intermezzi* which are by no means uninteresting, but we cannot go into everything. Now then we come to the *parabasis*, but I see the time is not sufficient to make this clear, therefore I would like to mention only one point. Then there is the *parabasis* in which the birds are presented as having accepted this story of the original rule, and presented in a very poetic way.

But then the founding, the formal founding of the city takes place, and on this occasion<sup>61</sup> [six] different individuals appear and want to be present. The first is of course a priest, who is to do the sacrificing; then there is a poet; then there is an oracle fellow; and fourth, Meton; five, an inspector; and sixth, a seller of decrees. The only one who has a proper name is Meton. The others are all not identified. Meton was an astronomer. This scene regarding the astronomer is of the utmost importance, as we shall see later. I will mention only one point. The city is founded and its fame spreads throughout the world. Everyone, all human beings, wish to become members of this wonderful city. Three come and are shown to us: a man who wants to strike his father, because he has heard that in the City of Birds you can strike your father; then Cinesias, a poet; and finally, a sycophant, a crook. Again, there is only one mentioned who has a proper name. And this time it is a poet.<sup>62</sup>

The connection between the astronomer (the man with the proper name in the first set) and the poet (the man with the proper name in the second set) is of crucial importance to our understanding the naming of the place. And<sup>63</sup> to bring us around to the connection with the *Clouds* in a few words, the poet is accepted, the poet is treated best, among the first set. Meton, the astronomer, is thrown out, and he is even thrown out with beatings! It is not quite clear who beats him, whether Peisthetaerus beats him or whether the birds beat him, but surely if Peisthetaerus beats him, he would do it in the spirit of the citizens; he would not do it on his own accord. He says explicitly: I love you. I would keep you, but I can't.<sup>xv</sup> And there is a nice connection between that and<sup>64</sup> the man who wishes to strike his father. Peisthetaerus contradicts himself there, and we have to discuss that. In the first place, he says: Yes. We birds are permitted to strike our father[s].<sup>xvi</sup> And then he speaks of another law, also stemming from birds, according to which one may not strike one's father.

The play ends with the victory, the complete victory of Peisthetaerus. The gods are starved, and they have to give up their rule to this clever Athenian because, since he's the ruler of the birds, not the birds rule but Peisthetaerus rules. So Peisthetaerus<sup>65</sup> takes the place of Zeus, and he marries Kingship, with a capital K, the daughter of Zeus. He wins completely. So the gods can be disposed of. They are expendable. But certain things are not expendable. Also the *polis*, in the ordinary sense: we have now a universal *polis*, no longer a *polis* limited to a special locality. Hence the *polis* as a closed society is expendable. Two things are inexpendable: (a) the prohibition against beating one's father, and (b) the prohibition against the admission of astronomy. [LS raps on the table] These are the absolute limits.<sup>66</sup> I mean, you can have a wonderful *polis*, a most convenient and satisfactory *polis* for everyone, and<sup>67</sup> most pleasant and enjoyable, and no gods, and wonderful, but two things cannot be tolerated: beating one's father and astronomy.

That's the link with the *Clouds*, because in the *Clouds*,<sup>68</sup> among the many things which are ascribed to Socrates, the most peculiar and most strongly emphasized is astronomy: the science of *heaven*, the heavenly bodies and their motion. And the heaven is a vault comprising the whole; therefore it is the whole. This science of the whole is somehow connected with rebellion against the most fundamental authority, the paternal authority. These are the two things which

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<sup>xv</sup> *Birds* 1010-1020.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Birds* 1349-1350.

are incompatible with human society. Peisthetaerus *loves* the astronomer Meton, but as the founder of the city he has to throw him out; and therefore there is an important substitution.<sup>69</sup> In the first set, the only man mentioned by a personal name, a proper name, is the astronomer. In the second set, the only individual mentioned by a proper name is the poet. The poet *can* be tolerated by the city. He can be. The city needs him, really. But not the philosopher. You see just the opposite in Plato, you remember: the philosophers are the rulers, ought to be the rulers, and the poets are sent away, just as here the astronomer, who stands for the philosopher, is sent away.<sup>70</sup> The fundamental problem is the same, and therefore the name of that city—the Cloud-cuckoo-city, or however you might translate *Nephelococcygia*<sup>71</sup>—shows very clearly the connection with the problem of Socrates. There is a fundamental disproportion between science, philosophy,<sup>72</sup> or the *logos* and the *polis*. The *logos* may render questionable the foundation of society, and therefore it cannot be tolerated. The poets know what the philosophers know—that’s the implication—but they don’t say it in a way which destroys the city, and therefore they can be tolerated. Now we have to go into some details of that next time.<sup>73</sup> Good.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted “know what—.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “what is—.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “between.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “there—.”

<sup>6</sup> Changed from “but only Marxism in the most well-known and extreme form of that.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “in.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “of his plays—.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “there—Aristophanes—I mean.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “what is this—.”

<sup>11</sup> Changed from “on—at all times, has to—shows itself—.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “And the reason here too is the—.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “—you.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “—politically, was of course the view.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “they—so that.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “there is—.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “Euripides.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “in favor—.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “So the general formula is—.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “three—.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “to find—.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “b).”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “b).”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “That—.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “brutal”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “makes—.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “What—.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “, it is.”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “is a more—.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “The most—.”

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “and a much more important—.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “That is one-tenth—.”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted “like.”

<sup>35</sup> Deleted “it begins.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “page three—.”

<sup>37</sup> Deleted “this—.”

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<sup>38</sup> Deleted “That—.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “(Do you have a match?)”

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “(Thank you very much.)”

<sup>41</sup> Deleted “Say.”

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “that is not—.”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “in—.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “there is—.”

<sup>45</sup> Deleted “That is—.”

<sup>46</sup> Deleted “**LS:** Boeotia.

**Same Student:** Pardon?

**LS:** Boeotia, yes. All right. It doesn’t make any difference. Ya.

<sup>47</sup> Deleted “let’s—.”

<sup>48</sup> Deleted “strike—.”

<sup>49</sup> Deleted “This is, in other words, it is—.”

<sup>50</sup> Deleted “an old man.”

<sup>51</sup> Deleted “has.”

<sup>52</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>53</sup> Deleted “he.”

<sup>54</sup> Deleted “his.”

<sup>55</sup> Deleted “How can you—.”

<sup>56</sup> Deleted “What does he—.”

<sup>57</sup> Deleted “223.”

<sup>58</sup> Deleted “a novel—.”

<sup>59</sup> Deleted “that—.”

<sup>60</sup> Deleted “—and.”

<sup>61</sup> Deleted “five.”

<sup>62</sup> Deleted “There is—.”

<sup>63</sup> Deleted “this is connected—.”

<sup>64</sup> Deleted “the striker—.”

<sup>65</sup> Deleted “becomes—.”

<sup>66</sup> Deleted “You.”

<sup>67</sup> Deleted “it—.”

<sup>68</sup> Deleted “what—.”

<sup>69</sup> Deleted “The only—.”

<sup>70</sup> Deleted “That—.”

<sup>71</sup> Deleted “is—.”

<sup>72</sup> Deleted “or whatever you call it”

<sup>73</sup> Deleted: “And, but still. [To a specific student:] You will have prepared your paper next time, eh?”

## Session 6: no date<sup>i</sup>

**Leo Strauss:** These feelings . . . in the course of events, I'm sorry to say.

**Student:** What it is of Plato's that we're going to be reading?

**LS:** The *Apology of Socrates* and the *Crito*. These are the two, probably the [two] most popular writings of Plato; I mean popular in the sense [of] most widely read. Now first let us remind ourselves for a moment, before<sup>1</sup> Mr. Haight and I begin our free-for-all, of our general problem. The course is entitled "The Origins of Political Science." We started from the fact that in our time rational thought is undergoing a crisis. And the question arises: Is this crisis due to reason itself, or is it due to a certain interpretation of reason, the modern interpretation? In order to clarify that we return to the origins of political science.

Now what are the origins of political science? What is the original conception of political science? I would like to say a word about that, although<sup>2</sup> most of you will know that but it doesn't do any harm if it is restated. Now the original conception of political science in its fully developed form is accessible in Aristotle's *Politics* and one can say only there. There political science is a *practical* science, and that means the perspective of Aristotle as the author of the *Politics* is identical with the perspective of the citizen or statesman. He looks farther afield than the statesman does, even the best statesman does, but he looks in the same direction. And political science in the Aristotelian sense is not a theoretical science; it is not an attempt to look at political things from the outside.<sup>3</sup> If this is political life [LS writes on the blackboard], which has a certain direction, there are two ways of looking at it. One is from here: from within the perspective following the direction of political things themselves, as the citizen does, the statesman does, and as Aristotle as a political philosopher does. But there is also a way, here, to look at it from the outside, just as we look at the movements of fishes or of leopards from the outside. We do not participate in that life. That would be a theoretical attitude toward political philosophy. That is characteristic of present-day social science, of course; although they use the participant-observer in a certain role, that is subordinate to a fundamentally theoretical approach. And if it is practical, it is practical in the sense of an applied science. You remember the distinction between an applied science and a practical science of which I spoke on a former occasion. The Aristotelian political science—and by the way, that is true not only of Aristotle but also of others, but Aristotle only develops his in a classic manner and [is] the model of everyone later who followed his approach.

By virtue of this practical character, the guiding theme of Aristotle's *Politics* is the question of what is the best order of society, the best regime. It also deals with the imperfect regimes and

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<sup>i</sup> On the audiotape of this session, the two parts of the session are placed in reverse order to their delivery. The first part, transcribed here, begins at 51:55 of the audiofile, and the second starts at the beginning of the tape. The transcript of the second part begins on page 109 below, as noted in n. xxxvi.

with the question of how this or that kind of imperfect regime can be managed or improved. But this management of the imperfect regimes and its principles can only be understood in the light of the best regime, because any improvement presupposes a standard for the improvement and the fully developed standard is the best regime. One can also put it this way: the doctrine of the best regime is the physiology of politics, whereas the doctrine of the various imperfect regimes is the pathology and therapeutics. That is a permissible comparison. Now the premises of this whole political doctrine as developed in the *Politics* is the answer to the question: What is good? What is the human good? And the human good, the core of the human good, is human excellence: virtue. And this is developed in Aristotle's *Ethics*, which is inseparable from the *Politics*, and vice versa.

Now Aristotle's political work, which is the *Politics* together with the *Ethics*, gives us the fullest development of the Socratic study of political things as political things, which means that what Aristotle does is not identical with what Socrates did or with what Plato did. But if Socrates or Plato had been concerned with a relatively independent science of politics, as they were not, they would have said what Aristotle said. Why they were not concerned with such a relatively independent treatment is a long question, into which I cannot go. But if we approach the whole problem from our present-day assumptions that there is a possibility of a relatively independent political science, Aristotle's work is the most immediately relevant exponent, or exposition, of that.<sup>4</sup> But behind Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics* there is somehow Socrates. Socrates turned to the political things, which means [that] in Socrates philosophy turned to the political things as such. Prior to Socrates, <sup>5</sup>philosophy was not concerned with political things as such.

What then was philosophy originally, prior to Socrates? One way to answer that question is the study of Aristophanes's *Clouds*, which presents Socrates himself as a representative of the pre-Socratic view of philosophy—even in the form of a comedy, and that must be read judiciously, that goes without saying. But nevertheless, here in the *Clouds*, in this pre-Socratic form of Socrates, philosophy is purely theoretical. The spirit of the philosopher is akin or identical to that of the mathematician. Self-forgetting contemplation of the principles; no self-knowledge. Just as the mathematician is, as a mathematician, not concerned with the question “What is mathematics? What am I doing as a human being engaged in mathematics?” but is concerned with the mathematical object, the same is true of the philosopher in this presentation. This is roughly speaking correct, but it is not literally true because the disregard of the political things by this philosopher in the *Clouds* has a reason, the reason being that the political things are essentially conventional and therefore you cannot learn anything from them about the nature of things. You understand from here why the beginning of Aristotle's *Politics* is so eminently apt, the beginning being the assertion: the *polis* is by *nature*; man is by *nature* a political animal.<sup>ii</sup>

Convention comes in only a very secondary place. If the *polis* is natural, then the philosophic understanding of man is, implies, includes understanding of political things. I said there is a deep harmony between Aristotle's *Politics* and Socrates, but that is no identity, and that is indicated by this little point: that Socrates never said the *polis* is natural. He took it very seriously, but he never said [that] it's natural. What this means is a question which we will clarify to some extent by our later study of Plato. Before we can begin to understand Socrates we have to arrive at a

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<sup>ii</sup> *Politics* 1.1.9 (1253a). The emphasis is Strauss's.

better understanding of the position which Socrates attacks, against which political science came into being. And this position which Socrates attacks is presented to us by Aristophanes,<sup>6</sup> among others. But Aristophanes has great advantages, of which I have spoken more than once.

Aristophanes's claim can be put as follows: the poets, in contradistinction to the philosophers, are open to the phenomena, to some phenomena to which the philosophers are blind. The poet understands the political things. By the way, this is also intelligible today, immediately.<sup>7</sup> I think I mentioned this simple observation before, that today you find sometimes a novel which gives you a deeper understanding of political things than many volumes of political science—handbooks, textbooks, and periodicals. You know? But it had a particular bearing in this early time. The poets are open to phenomena to which the philosophers are blind. Therefore Socratic philosophy as it came with the revered Socrates, the Socrates we know from Plato and Xenophon, is directed *both* against an earlier philosophy and against the poets. Socratic philosophy tries to do philosophically what according to Aristophanes could be done only poetically, so that the fight against the<sup>8</sup> [poets], which is so well known from the *Republic*,<sup>iii</sup> is an absolutely essential part of the beginning of political science.

Now<sup>9</sup> in order to exactly understand a bit better what Aristophanes is dealing with, I would like to read to you a passage from Plato's *Laws*, page 690; that's in the third book somewhere, 690.<sup>iv</sup> I read it to you from the simple translation.

[Athenian Stranger:] What and how many are the agreed claims<sup>v</sup> in the matter of ruling and being ruled, alike in cities<sup>vi</sup> and in households? Is not the claim<sup>vii</sup> of the father and mother one of them? And in general would not the claim of parents to rule over offspring be a claim universally just?

[Clinias:] Certainly.

[Ath.:] And next to this, the right of the noble to rule over the ignoble; and then, following on these as a third claim, the right of older people to rule and of younger people<sup>viii</sup> to be ruled.

[Clin.:] To be sure.

[Ath.:] The fourth claim<sup>ix</sup> is that slaves ought to be ruled, and masters ought to rule.

[Clin.:] Undoubtedly.

[Ath.:] And the fifth is, I imagine, that the stronger should rule and the weaker be ruled.

[Clin.:] A truly compulsory form of rule! [Says the interlocutor—LS]

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<sup>iii</sup> Cf. *Republic*, book 10.

<sup>iv</sup> Strauss reads from the Loeb edition, translated by R. G. Bury. The number refers to the Stephanus pagination, specifically 690a-c.

<sup>v</sup> Bury has "rights or claims."

<sup>vi</sup> Bury has "States, large or small."

<sup>vii</sup> Bury has "right."

<sup>viii</sup> Bury omits "people."

<sup>ix</sup> Bury has "right."



[Ath.:] Yes, and one that is very prevalent among all kinds of living beings,<sup>x</sup> being “according to nature,” as Pindar the poet<sup>xi</sup> once said. The most important claim<sup>xii</sup> is, it would seem, the sixth, which ordains that the man without understanding should follow, and the wise man lead and rule. Nevertheless, my most sapient Pindar, this is a thing that I, for one, would hardly assert to be against nature [namely, the rule of the wise—LS] but rather, according to nature<sup>xiii</sup>—the natural rule of law, without force, over willing subjects.

**LS:** In other words, the implication is here meant that law is the embodiment of wisdom, and therefore, most correct.<sup>xiv</sup>

[Ath.:] To be favored by the gods and to have good luck marks<sup>xv</sup> the seventh form of rule, where we bring a man forward for a casting of lots, and declare that if he gains the lot he will most justly be the ruler,<sup>xvi</sup> but if he fails he shall take his place among the ruled.<sup>xvii</sup>

Now these are the seven claims. What Plato<sup>10</sup> implies is that in any actual *polis*, these seven<sup>11</sup> claims are somehow embodied. And of these, the most sensible is the rule of wisdom. But this is not the only one. There is, for example, also the claim of mere strength, and the reason is clear, because the wise cannot compel the unwise if they do not have the support of much strength supplied by armies, is given. And there is also the claim of the old, the mere old, to have a higher right than the young, and in the first place of course the parents, as you see. That is a sketch of the political problem. The political problem consists precisely in this:<sup>12</sup> that political government is for all practical purposes never the rule of wisdom as such, but other lower, harsher elements are added to it in order to make it political rule. The *polis* combines these different types, which have very different weight. That is the problem of the *polis*, this mixture of heterogeneous elements and yet which must be accepted if we are to go on to accept the *polis*.

This applies also to the household. The parents have a right over their children, as Plato makes clear by his distinction: the rule of the parents is not the rule of the wise as such. And yet what is the title of the parents, if not wisdom? That’s a difficulty. In one way of course it is [the rule of the wiser]. Why do parents have the right to boss around, to guide, to command, or whatever you call it, their children? Because we assume that being older, more experienced, they can take care of the children better than the children themselves can. But two questions arise.<sup>13</sup> Do all parents necessarily care for their children, as birds care for their offspring? You only have to read the daily papers and what is going on in certain social agencies to see that human mothers are not as dependable as swallow mothers. But even granting for one moment they would care, that would not be of very great help because caring combined with stupidity is practically as bad as not

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<sup>x</sup> Bury has “creatures.”

<sup>xi</sup> Bury has “Pindar of Thebes.”

<sup>xii</sup> Bury has “right.”

<sup>xiii</sup> Bury has “according thereto.”

<sup>xiv</sup> Strauss omits the interlocutor’s assent: “A very just observation.”

<sup>xv</sup> Bury has “Heaven’s favor and good luck mark.”

<sup>xvi</sup> Bury has simply “ruler.”

<sup>xvii</sup> Plato, *The Laws*, vol. 1, trans. R. G. Bury (Loeb Classical Library) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 211-13. Book 3, 690a-c.

caring. What do we see here? We see a legal assumption that, very generally and crudely speaking, it is better if the young children are brought up by the people who generated them than by strangers. But that is a crude legal assumption based on very tough things, for example, the unwillingness of other people to take care of other people's "quote brats unquote." And so the law simply says: No, *you* have to take care of them! Whether you are fit or not, that's your business, and if you prove to be grossly unfit, you will be sentenced to jail in addition to all other considerations.

This problem was discussed at very great detail (at least at relatively very great detail), by the way, by John Locke in<sup>14</sup> the first part of *Civil Government*,<sup>xviii</sup> where he discusses the great question: [From] where does paternal power derive, and what is its meaning? And where he, for example, makes a subtle distinction because his opponent, a fellow called Filmer,<sup>xix</sup> had said the mere act of begetting gives a man the right to respect and being obeyed throughout his life by the individual he has begotten. And Locke says that doesn't make much sense if he is not at the same time the one who brings up that child, and then he goes on into more subtleties of this question. And needless to say, here also the question arises of, you know, of whether a given man who is a father according to law is in fact a father. The Napoleonic civil code had this famous prescription: "*la recherche de la paternité est interdite*"—in the case of an illegitimate child, it is forbidden to make any inquiries as to the identity of the father. Napoleon needed soldiers. And this is one side of the matter.

But to come back to the main point: we find here, after a very brief inspection, a legal assumption<sup>15</sup> on which the whole social order is based. This legal assumption presents itself, however, and for a very deep reason *must* present itself, as a sacred law. Now<sup>16</sup> the problem with which such people as Aristophanes are concerned is to say—I mean, if they would not overstate it for reasons of comical effect and some other things: You, the *polis*, transform a tolerable rule of thumb into a sacred law. And<sup>17</sup> the rule of thumb is all right as rule of thumb, because as rule of thumb it admits exceptions and deviations. But a sacred law does not admit exceptions. And you can make the application to the somewhat harsher question of incest by yourself.

Now<sup>18</sup> we have seen some discussion of that in the *Clouds*, and this is taken up again in the *Birds*. I remind you only of a few points before we go on.<sup>19</sup> The action of the *Birds*: two Athenians leave their city in quest for a perfect city, a city where everyone can live by himself,<sup>20</sup> is left alone, can devote himself to his pleasure. Such a city doesn't exist, neither now nor ever. They have to found that city, as they have to found a city in Plato's *Republic* for somewhat different reasons. But this city, this perfect city, apparently is not possible as a city of human beings. It is possible only as a city of birds. Only a city of birds can have the perfect place which a perfect city must have, the perfect place being the most strategic place imaginable, between heaven and earth, controlling the traffic between gods and men. This perfect city is, as it is hardly necessary to say, a *universal* city, because if you say a particular city you say war. Ya? At least the possibility of war, and that means you'll have war. So only a universal city can be really pleasurable, and it is also of course a universal democracy: no harsh distinction between classes, no slavery.

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<sup>xviii</sup> That is, the first treatise of *Two Treatises of Civil Government*.

<sup>xix</sup> Sir Robert Filmer, a prominent defender of monarchy and divine right. Filmer died before Locke published any of his own major works.

The man who founds the city is the Athenian Peisthetaerus.<sup>21</sup> The name would translate *pistos*: *pistos* means reliable, faithful, and *hetairos* means comrade or friend. The name is of course a coinage by Aristophanes, and I have no better explanation of it than that. In the earliest comedy which has been preserved to us, the *Acharnians*, the hero is called Dikaiopolis [LS writes on the blackboard], which is also a very strange name for a man. That means “just,” and that means “city:”<sup>xx</sup> a man called Just City. I believe that Peisthetaerus is somehow modeled on that name. [LS continues to write on the blackboard] The first part, *pist-*, means faithful, reliable, but as one could prove, this word faithful, reliable has in a way even a broader meaning than the word just: the thoroughly dependable man in every respect. And *polis* is replaced by *hetairos*, by comrade, by friend. It is not quite a *polis* which he founds, as we see from the fact that the only humans who are clearly members of it are these two Athenians. All the rest are birds. But this is a mere guess, and I mention it only in passing.

Now let us turn to the point where we left off. Did your objections to my interpretation reach a point already where you could state them clearly, or should we not rather finish?

**Mr. Haight:** I would prefer that we finish.

**LS:** Yes, I think that’s sensible. All right. Now let us turn to where we left off. Let us turn to the bottom of page 33 in the translation, which is verse 676. Will you read that?

**Reader:**

[Ch.:] O darling! O tawny-throat!  
 Love, whom I love the best,  
 Dearer than all the rest,  
 Playmate and partner in  
 All my soft lays,  
 Thou art come! Thou art come!  
 Thou hast dawned on my gaze,  
 I have heard thy sweet note,  
 Nightingale! Nightingale!  
 Thou from my flute    Softly-sounding canst bring  
 Music to suit            With our songs of the Spring:  
 Begin then I pray  
 Our own anapaestic address to essay.

**LS:** Ya, let us stop there for a moment. You see, the . . . of the chorus are here birds, but the birds speak verses. The poet refers to the kinship of birds to the poet, and that is one reason why the birds have been selected. Sweet song is what they share. What is the exception in the case of man, sweet song, is the rule in the case of the birds, at least of certain birds, especially the nightingale. The question is: Is there not also a kinship of the poet with the Clouds in the comedy called *Clouds*? I mean the Clouds here. Surely the imitative character of the Clouds, you remember, which connects the Clouds with the poets . . . Now then let us read the immediate sequel where we left off.

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<sup>xx</sup> Strauss indicates the parts of the name by writing on the blackboard.

**Reader:**

[Ch.:] Ye men who are dimly existing below, who perish and fade as the leaf,  
 Pale, weebegone, shadowlike, spiritless folk, life feeble and wingless and brief,  
 Frail castings in clay, who are gone in a day, like a dream full of sorrow and  
 sighing,  
 Come listen with care to the Birds of the air, the ageless, the deathless, who flying  
 In the joy and the freshness of Ether, are wont to muse upon wisdom undying.  
 We will tell you of things transcendental; of Springs and of Rivers the mighty  
 upheaval;  
 The nature of Birds; and the birth of the Gods: and of Chaos and Darkness  
 primeval.  
 When this ye shall know, let old Prodicus go, and be hanged without hope of  
 reprieve.

**LS:** Yes. Now Prodicus is this famous man mentioned in *The Clouds*, with whom young Socrates was connected. The birds are here presented as immortals, as being renowned always, as ethereal beings which teach ephemeral man the truth about the heavenly things: the nature, the coming into being of birds, gods, and rivers. Now this of course they have already undergone. They were simple fellows, the birds, before, but our clever Athenian had taught them that they were the gods and the origin of everything, and they act on that. You see, they are quick learners in a way. Ya? Go on.

**Same Student:**

[Ch.:] There was Chaos at first, and Darkness, and Night, and Tartarus vasty and  
 dismal;  
 But the Earth was not there, nor the Sky, nor the Air, till at length in the bosom  
 abysmal  
 Of Darkness an egg, from the whirlwind conceived, was laid by the sable-plumed  
 Night.  
 And out of that egg, as the Seasons revolved, sprang Love, the entrancing, the  
 bright,  
 Love brilliant and bold with his pinions of gold, like a whirlwind, refulgent and  
 sparkling!  
 Love hatched us, commingling in Tartarus wide, with Chaos, the murky, the  
 darkling,  
 And brought us above, as the firstlings of love, and first to the light we ascended.

**LS:** Now let us stop. You know, the birds give now a cosmology. They are the gods. They must be the first beings. Literally this cannot be true, because in all theogonies there was something before, maybe heaven and earth or whatever it was. We see here they are preceded by Eros. Those who will remember Plato's *Banquet* will not be surprised by that. Eros is—. <sup>xxi</sup> In a way, Eros (love, desire) is the first of all beings. At least he is the first of all bright or shining beings, the first to bring things to light. Does this make sense, that Eros is the first <sup>22</sup> because he is the first which brings things to light? <sup>23</sup> All beings are generated, let's assume, and generation

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<sup>xxi</sup> There is a brief gap in the tape here.

presupposes the act of generating, i.e., *Eros*. To be means to be—that is the implication of that—to be means to be *something*, to have a character. There is not a being which merely is; it is always this or that being. To have a character, a limit setting off this from that, a nature.<sup>24</sup> To be means to be limited, and as a limited [being], it is distinguished from any possible source of all beings which, as a source of all beings, is unlimited. Infinite: that's the same word, unlimited and infinite. And infinite, where you cannot make any distinction: poetically expressed, night, or something like night. This the origin, chaos. They are mixed;<sup>25</sup> perhaps one chaos, one unlimited will not do, because you cannot understand the difference if there is only one such principle. Perhaps you need more, and that was the more common view. The elements: there are four elements, for example, out of which all else comes. But these elements are not things; they are the sources of things, not things. These elements must be brought together: they must be mixed, they must be united, so that there be things. But that which brings heterogeneous things together is, in the widest sense of the word, the uniting principle, *Eros*. That is the doctrine behind this birds' cosmology. Now let us read the next two verses where we left off.

**Reader:**

[Ch.:] There was never a race of Immortals at all till Love had the universe blended;  
Then all things commingling together in love, there arose the fair Earth, and the Sky,  
And the limitless Sea; and the race of the Gods, the Blessed, who never shall die. (*Birds*, 676-702)

**LS:** Yes, let us stop here. Now<sup>26</sup> we see the mixture. There is a mixture of heterogeneous elements, and that presupposes a mixing principle, and that is called *Eros*. And out of that the gods came, and of course here according to this thesis the birds. The birds are the firstlings of *Eros*, and therefore the givers of the greatest things to the mortals. The birds appeal to men for recognition as gods, just as the Clouds did in the *Clouds*, you remember? But there is a difference: the birds try to take the place of the Olympian gods, whereas the Clouds only demanded to be recognized in addition to the Olympian gods. The Clouds were much more modest than the birds are. Hence the action of this play is much more daring than the action of the *Clouds*. Hence it takes place not in Athens, but in a faraway place. So that makes sense.

Now let us see what we learn about the life of the birds in the sequel. We turn to verse 753 following, which is the third paragraph on page 36 of the translation. Let someone else read. Do you have it? You are our—

**Mr. Metzel:** Page 36?

**LS:** Page 36, paragraph three. Because you are a notarized reader. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ch.:] Is there any one amongst you, O spectators, who would lead  
With the birds a life of pleasure, let him come to us with speed.  
All that here is reckoned shameful, all that here the laws condemn,  
With the birds is right and proper, you may do it all with them.

Is it here by law forbidden for a son to beat his sire?  
 That a chick should strike his father, strutting up with youthful ire,  
 Crowing *Raise your spur and fight me*, that is what the birds admire.  
 Come you runaway deserter, spotted o'er with marks of shame,  
 Spotted Francolin we'll call you, that, with us, shall be your name.  
 You who style yourself a tribesman, Phrygian pure as Spintharus,  
 Come and be a Phrygian linnet, with Philemon's breed, with us.  
 Come along, you slave and Carian, Excecestides to wit,  
 Breed with us your Cuckoo-rearers, they'll be guildsmen apt and fit.  
 Son of Peisias, who to outlaws would the city gates betray,  
 Come to us, and be a partridge (*cockerel like the cock*, they say),  
 We esteem it no dishonor knavish partridge tricks to play. (753-768)

**LS:** Yes, let us stop here. You see, that is the simple and I think perfectly clear description of the perfect city as Peisthetaerus sees it. The overall formula: pleasure. The things which are disgraceful by convention are noble with the birds, namely, because they are noble by nature. That is implied. The birds' society is a natural society—beating the father, of course.<sup>27</sup> You know, you have again examples in the daily papers. The boy is told he shouldn't do that; his mother nags him. According to the law, he has to obey. According to nature, he can hit back. Ya? And even, I think, if he kills her, according to a certain interpretation of American law he will be regarded as, well, as in need of psychiatric treatment and not as someone who has done something disgraceful. No slavery, nothing wrong with cowardice. The harsh duties of civic right, they're out. No distinction between citizens and foreigners, which is a hardship for the foreigner. No such distinction. Why? Because it is a universal society. A completely pleasant society must be a universal society. That is said today, and that was already known to Aristophanes and some earlier men. So we have now, I think, a clear picture of what happens.

At this moment or shortly after, the founding of the city begins. The first question is how it should be called. Perhaps we'll read that. That's in the translation, page 38, bottom, verse 809. Yes? Do you have it?

**Mr. Metzel:** Where Peisthetaerus and—

**LS:** Peisthetaerus speaks, yes.

**Mr. Metzel:** Euelpides speak?

**LS:** Yes, "First we must give the city<sup>28</sup> a great and splendid name, and then we must sacrifice to the gods afterwards." That is the plan of what follows. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**<sup>29</sup>

[Pei:] First we must give to the city  
 Some grand big name: and then we'll sacrifice  
 To the high Gods.  
 [Eu:] That's my opinion also.

[Ch.:] Well,<sup>xxii</sup> then let's consider what the name shall be.

[Pei.:] What think you of that grand Laconian name,  
Sparta?

[Eu.:] What! Sparta for my city? No.

I wouldn't use esparto for my pallet,

Not if I'd cords; by Heracles, not I.

[Pei.:] How shall we name it then?<sup>30</sup>

**LS:** You see, just as he rejected aristocracy at an earlier stage, when they wanted a good city, they reject now the very name of Sparta. That's all. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] How shall we name it then?

[Eu.:] Invent some fine

Magniloquent name, drawn from these upper spaces

And clouds.

[Pei.:] What think you of Cloudcuckoobury?

[Ch.:] O<sup>xxiii</sup> Good! Good!

You have found a good big name, and no mistake.

[Eu.:] Is this the great Cloudcuckoobury town

Where all the wealth of Aeschines lies hid,

And all Theagenes's?

[Pei.:] Best of all,

This is the plain of Phlegra, where the Gods

Outshot the giants at the game of Brag. (809-825)

**LS:** And so on. Now then there is to be found a protecting god in particular, and that's of course a bird, and in this case a cock. Then after these most urgent questions have been settled, one must sacrifice—because that is a sacred action, the founding of a *polis*—to the gods, but naturally to the new gods, ya, to the birds, of which Peisthetaerus now is the ruler. That is the beautiful inverse, you know: the ruler of the birds sacrifices to his subjects, and a priest has to be called in to sacrifice to the new gods. This pious man has no trepidations to sacrifice to the heirs to the Olympian gods, but he is sent away—not because of any orthodoxy of his, but because he invites too many birds, i.e., gods, and so not sufficient remains for these new gods to feed on.

And Peisthetaerus himself will bring the sacrifice but is interrupted by another individual, namely, by a poet. The poet takes the place of the priest. The poet lies, as would appear if you would read it, and as would not surprise you, because that was the common Greek saying: "The poets lie much."<sup>xxiv</sup> They tell many stories which are not true. In high Pindaric lyric poetry he asks for presents, which he receives. They are garments taken away from the priest's assistants—you see that the poet is in every respect the successor to the priest. He receives these presents because he may bring evil on the *polis* if he is not satisfied. How could the poor poet bring evil

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<sup>xxii</sup> Rogers omits "Well."

<sup>xxiii</sup> Rogers omits "O."

<sup>xxiv</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.2.

on the *polis*? I mean,<sup>31</sup> he ain't got no machine guns as a poet [laughter], to say nothing of atomic bombs. But what does he have?

**Student:** A poem.

**LS:** Yes, and how does it work to the detriment of the *polis*? Could it work to the detriment of the *polis*?

**Student:** By persuading them.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** It could persuade them.

**LS:** The *fame*, the fame. The poets are most powerful regarding the fame of individuals and cities, and therefore they have to be respected.<sup>32</sup> Peisthetaerus says explicitly here in verse 947, "One must benefit" or "help the poet."<sup>xxv</sup> That's the principle. But he is also sent away, but not quite just as the poets are sent away in the *Republic* but in a much more friendly spirit.

Then there comes the oracle man, and he is thrown out with utter disgrace. He begs for presents as the poet does, but in contradistinction to the poet the basis of his begging are holy texts. The poet didn't . . . beg, and he had beautiful songs, but there was no direct connection. But he begs on the basis of divine texts, and he doesn't receive anything. He's a boaster. The things which he says are not true. And then we come to another individual who is most important to us, and that is Meton. In translation on page 45, verse 992. Now read it, then.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Meton:] "I come amongst you—"

**LS:** Yes.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] Some new misery this!  
Come to do what?

**LS:** And he says? This fellow Meton, yes? Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] What's your scheme's form and outline?<sup>33</sup>  
What's your design? What buskin's on your foot?  
[Met.:] I come to survey<sup>xxvi</sup> this Air of yours,  
And mete it out by acres.  
[Pei.:] Heaven and earth!  
Whoever are you?

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<sup>xxv</sup> *Birds* 947. Strauss's translation.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Rogers has "land-survey."



[Met.:] Whoever am I! I'm Meton.  
Known throughout Hellas and Colonus.

[Pei.:] And<sup>xxvii</sup> what are *these*?

[Met.:] They're rods for Air-surveying.  
I'll just explain. The Air's, in outline, like  
One vast extinguisher; so then, observe,  
Applying here my flexible rod, and fixing  
My compass there,—you understand?"

[Pei.:] I don't.

[Met.:] With the straight rod I measure out, that so  
The circle may be squared; and in the center  
A market place; and streets be leading to it  
Straight to the very center; just as from  
A star, though circular, straight rays flash out  
In all directions.

[Pei.:] Why, the man's a Thales!

**LS:** You see, that was very—as in some circles today, the man is an Einstein or a Newton.<sup>'34</sup> By the way,<sup>35</sup> Meton actually lived in Athens himself. We know a little bit about him. Yes, go on.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] Meton!

[Met.:] Yes, what?

[Pei.:] You know I love you, Meton,  
Take my advice, and slip away unnoticed.

[Met.:] Why, what's the matter?

[Pei.:] As in Lacedaemon  
There's stranger-hunting; and a great disturbance;  
And blows in plenty.

[Met.:] What, a Revolution?

[Pei.:] No, no, not that.

[Met.:] What then?

[Pei.:] They're<sup>xxviii</sup> all resolved  
With one consent to wallop every quack.

**LS:** Yes, "all boasters." "All boasters."

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Met.:] I'd best be going.

[Pei.:] Faith, I'm not quite certain  
If you're in time; see, see the blows are coming!

[Met.:] O, murder! help!

[Pei.:] I told you how 'twould be.

Come, measure off your steps some other way. (992-1020)

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Rogers has "Aye, and."

<sup>xxviii</sup> Rogers has "They've."

**LS:** You see, it is by no means certain, as the commentators apparently assume, that Peisthetaerus<sup>36</sup> is beating him. It could very well be from the citizens. But even if the question is undecidable on the basis of the text, if Peisthetaerus beats him, he would not do it on his own accord. He says, "I love thee." But the *polis* doesn't stand for that kind of thing, what do you do. Meton is the only one with a proper name of these five people, because there also appear some other people.<sup>37</sup> We had already met one astronomer in the *Clouds*: Socrates. Meton does not ask for anything; he just wants to do something there. You see, it's some combination of astronomy with town planning. But the *polis* does not tolerate any of that and he is beaten. Yes,<sup>38</sup> he is beaten.

And it is important; you see, the city is in a way meant to be followable, ya? Geometric. Geometric: this [is a] regular city. In this country, the best example is of course Washington, [DC]. In the eighteenth century this kind of city was rather common. Yes? Also, in Europe, in the Age of Reason people built rational cities, and the most rational form seemed to be one center. In Paris, you have also an example in the Étoile, for those of you who have been there, and there are some cities in Germany from the same age and the same time. And the source of that, if one can say that, is a remark in Descartes's *Discourse on Method*, where he<sup>39</sup> opposes the old cities, where people just built houses as they saw fit. And later on there was a complete mess: the medieval city, you know, and the old upper-stories obstructing light, and all the other difficulties; and on the other hand the planned city, with perfect order.<sup>xxix</sup> That is an interesting example. That's the seventeenth, eighteenth [centuries], the age of rationalism. But the same thing existed in Greece, and we know this from a passage in Aristotle's *Politics* about such a town planner called Hippodamus,<sup>xxx</sup> and Meton is the same kind of fellow: an astronomic founder of the city, who tries to establish the heavenly order on earth. Also the Platonic city: in Plato's *Critias*, there is a city of this kind described, which is a perfectly ordered one, in Atlantis, which has something to do with Syracuse, I believe.<sup>40xxxi</sup> The main point is: the only individual coming to that sacrifice who has a proper name is the astronomer. And he plays a very special role because he is loved by the founder, but the founder cannot tolerate him, for the sake of the *polis*.

The other fellows who come afterwards are not very interesting. There is one, an inspector, who is also beaten by Peisthetaerus, but there is no reference made that this has anything to do with the sentiment of the citizens. And the same applies to the sixth individual, the seller of the Greek decrees, who is also beaten and sent away by Peisthetaerus; and in the seventh and last place, the inspector and the seller of degrees together. So if we count in the way in which I suggested, Meton would be the middle, which is, I believe, what the poet means; [he is] the central figure. The *polis* cannot tolerate astronomy. We know that already from the *Clouds*.

Now<sup>41</sup> some further aspects of the city of the birds come to light in the sequel. If you will turn in the translation to the middle of page 48, which is verse 1071. Yes? I mean<sup>42</sup> the basic ordinances of the new city. Yes?

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<sup>xxix</sup> *Discourse on the Method*, part 2 (original pp. 11-12).

<sup>xxx</sup> *Politics* 2.5.1 (1267b) and 7.10.4 (1330b).

<sup>xxxi</sup> *Critias* 115c-117e.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ch.:] Listen to the City's notice, specially proclaimed to-day;  
*Sirs, Diagoras the Melian whosoever of you slay,*  
*Shall receive, reward, one talent; and another we'll bestow*  
*If you slay some ancient tyrant, dead and buried long ago.*

**LS:** You see now, Diagoras of Melos was a fellow accused of atheism in Athens, and he is of course also <sup>43</sup>[intolerable] for the perfect city. Ya? Atheism and tyranny are the two things which are incompatible with the good city. Tyranny, obviously: oppression. And atheism for other reasons. The next two verses, three verses. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ch.:] We, the Birds, will give a notice, we proclaim with right good will,  
*Sirs, Philocrates, Sparrovian, whosoever of you kill,*  
*Shall receive, reward, one talent, if alive you bring him, four;*  
*Him who strings and sells the finches— (1071-1079)*

**LS:** And so on. That's not important. What does this show, this ordinance? The difference made between alive and dead, bringing him alive<sup>44</sup> [or] dead?<sup>45</sup> I mean, when you see these Western movies, there is no difference, alive or dead, but they made an enormous difference here. What does it show? You pay much more if he is brought in alive.

**Student:** More difficult.

**LS:** You think that's a sufficient reason? But why are they so eager, then, [for him to be] alive?

**Same Student:** Beating.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Beating.

**LS:** Vindictiveness, yes, vindictiveness. That is not unimportant, the theme of the vindictiveness of the *polis*. I mean, the individual must not be vindictive; that is clear for every decent man, and was clear to every decent man in all times. But the *polis* needs a certain kind of vindictiveness. That is, as you will see, one of the themes of the *Wasps*, the comedy to which we'll turn later.

In the sequel, we learn of the progress of the war against the gods.<sup>46</sup> After all, the gods have not yet been defeated, and the new gods have already founded their city. So we get some information from time to time about the war against the gods. Let us read a characteristic scene at the top of page 54, which is verse 1230. We cannot read everything, unfortunately.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Iris:] I? From the Father to mankind I'm flying,  
 To bid them on their bullock-slaughtering hearths  
 Slay sheep to the Olympian Gods, and steam

The streets with savour.

[Pei.:] What do you say? What Gods?

[Iris:] What Gods? To us, the Gods in Heaven, of course.

[Pei.:] What, are *you* Gods?

[Iris:] What other Gods exist?

[Pei.:] Birds are now Gods to men; and men must slay  
Victims to them; and not, by Zeus, to Zeus.

**LS:** That's beautiful. Yes, "not, by Zeus, to Zeus." That's very well translated, yes. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Iris:] O fool, fool, fool! Stir not the mighty wrath  
Of angry Gods, lest Justice, with the spade  
Of vengeful Zeus, demolish all thy race,  
And fiery vapour, with Licymnian strokes,  
Incinerate thy palace and thyself!

[Pei.:] Now listen, girl; have done with that bombast.  
(Don't move.) A Lydian or a Phrygian is it,  
You think to terrify with words like those?  
Look here.<sup>47</sup>

**LS:** He is an enlightened man. He cannot be impressed by these old stories, yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] If Zeus keep troubling me, I'll soon  
Incinerate his great Amphion<sup>xxxii</sup> domes,  
His<sup>xxxiii</sup> halls of state with eagles carrying fire.  
And up against him, to high heaven, I'll send  
More than six hundred stout Porphyrian rails  
All clad in leopard-skins. Yet I remember  
When one Porphyrian gave him toil enough.  
And as for you, his waiting-maid, if you  
Keep troubling me with your outrageous ways,  
I'll outrage *you*, and you'll be quite surprised  
To find the strength of an old man like me.

[Iris:] O shame upon you, wretch, your words and you.

[Pei.] Now then begone: shoo, shoo! Eurax patax!

[Iris:] My father won't stand this; I vow he won't.

[Pei.:] Now Zeus-a-mercy, maiden; fly you off,  
Incinerate some younger man than I. (1230-1261)

**LS:** And so on. In other words, the gods absolutely count for nothing. Ya? In the sequel, then, the fame of this new, perfectly happy city spreads to all men, and all men are filled with *eros*,

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Rogers has "Amphion's."

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Rogers has "And."

longing for the city of birds, and they wish to immigrate to that happy state. Again, this all precedes the victory over the gods. I mean, you know the risks which these poor fellows take, ya? After all, if the Olympian gods win, they will be exposed to terrible punishment, but apparently they are not afraid of it. And now we get a scene in which we see the first immigrants to the new city, the people who take that risk. Now the first is a father's-beater. A father's-beater. This scene we must read because of its great importance.<sup>48</sup> I don't have the reference here, but you will easily find it.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Father-Beater:] O that I might an eagle be,  
Flying, flying, flying, flying  
Over the surge of the untilled sea!  
[Pei.:] Not false, methinks, the tale our envoy told us.  
For here comes one whose song is full<sup>xxxiv</sup> of eagles.  
[F-B:] Fie on it!  
There's nothing in this world so sweet as flying;  
I've quite a passion for these same bird-laws.  
In fact I'm gone bird-mad, and fly, and long  
To dwell with you, and hunger for your laws.  
[Pei.:] Which of our laws? for birds have many laws.

**LS:** You see? That's not uninteresting. In other words, it is not quite as simple, this new happy life, as it seems. There are many laws. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[F-B:] All! All! but most of all that jolly law  
Which lets a youngster throttle and beat his father.  
[Pei.:] Aye if a cockerel beat his father here,  
We do indeed account him quite a—Man.  
[F-B:] That's why I moved up hither and would fain  
Throttle my father and get all he has.  
[Pei.:] But there's an ancient law among the birds,  
You'll find it in the tablets of the storks;  
*When the old stork has brought his<sup>49</sup> storklings up,*  
*And all are fully fledged for flight, then they*  
*Must<sup>50</sup> in their turn maintain the stork their father.*

[F-B:] A jolly lot of good I've gained by coming,  
If now I've got to feed my father too!  
[Pei.:] Nay, my poor boy, you came here well-disposed,  
And so I'll rig you like an orphan bird.  
And here's a new suggestion, not a bad one,  
But what I learnt myself when I was young.  
Don't beat your father, lad; but take this wing,  
And grasp this spur of battle in your hand,

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Rogers has "all."

And think this crest a game-cock's martial comb.  
 Now march, keep guard, live on your soldier's pay,  
 And let your father be. If you want fighting,  
 Fly off to Thraceward regions, and fight there.  
 [F-B:] By Dionysus, I believe you're right.  
 I'll do it too.  
 [Pei.:] You'll show your sense, by Zeus! (1337-1371)

**LS:** Yes, let us stop here. So that was the first scene, you see. Now there is a great difficulty. Did you notice the difficulty? What's the difficulty? A very obvious one.

**Student:** They invited them, and now they repel them.

**LS:** Yes. In other words, it seemed up to now [that] we knew that the birds can do with their parents what they like. And now this proves to be wrong. And immediately after this occurs, Peisthetaerus even says: Yes, that is our law. Our youngsters may beat their fathers. Then he wholly abruptly and illogically says: We forbid that. What does this mean? Yes?

**Student:**<sup>xxxv</sup> Does Peisthetaerus say they can beat their fathers, but they also have to keep their fathers? I don't know if this is the translation, or—

**LS:** Well, let me see.

**Same Student:** He says: Yes,<sup>51</sup> we allow the youngsters to beat the fathers, but also—

**LS:** That's a good point you make. In other words, you deny the contradiction. You say—

**Same Student:** They are . . . allowed to beat them, they also have to keep them.

**LS:** Yes, the contradiction is only<sup>52</sup> against killing. That's a very good point. So there would be no contradiction. I was not aware of that. You are quite right. So he says: You may beat your father, but you cannot do what you want, to throttle him and get his property. You can only beat him, but you have to feed him. Ya? That is true.

Well, let me first try to set forth my interpretation and be corrected then on the basis of your suggestion.<sup>53</sup> He says there are many laws of birds. One could understand this also as follows: some for the birds, and some for the men ruled by the birds. Here the suggestion is made: some for birds in general, and others of storks, as he says here. Now then one would have to consider the question, What is the special position of the storks?, which would lead to a very complicated argument. The storks are there presented as the special guardians, the guardian birds, and so they are under special laws. Evidently there<sup>54</sup> is not the same law for every citizen in every respect. The birds may beat their fathers, even kill them. Ya? He says so. Let me see. No, they may not kill them. That was my error. Ya. They may not kill them.

**Same Student:** But the sire-striker assumes that they may kill them.

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<sup>xxxv</sup> Possibly Heberlou.

**LS:** Ya. He assumes that they may kill them, and that's the error. Yes. So in other words, you are quite right, there is no contradiction, there is only a qualification.<sup>55</sup> But still, the contradiction is this way: not all birds are obliged to feed their old fathers; only some birds . . . Now Peisthetaerus refers then to that law which commands the children to feed their parents. And the interesting point is this: this very corrupt fellow obeys him immediately. Ya? Obeys him immediately without any contradiction. How come? He is an honest man. He does not break the law. He did not break the law in Athens, where it was forbidden, and he only wants to go to a place where he could lawfully do it. When he finds out that he cannot lawfully do it there, he obeys. And he does not complain. That is very important, because later on we will see there is another fellow, a sycophant, who is really a dishonest fellow and who does *not* obey. So the man who, following a principle, even if a wrong principle, ya?, but is at the same time—I mean, believes in a wrong principle but is law-abiding, that's an honest—<sup>xxxvi</sup>

**LS:** —Mr. Edward. Because we haven't talked for some time. I will write your name down here. And now let us come to the next [scene]. Here we have only three people among the immigrants. Two are nameless, and the central one has a name, a proper name, just as in the first case.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In the first case it was the astronomer, now it is the poet. Now<sup>56</sup> what does the poet say?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Cinesias (the poet):] On the lightest of wings I am soaring on high,  
Lightly from measure to measure I fly.  
[Pei.:] Bless me, this creature wants a pack of wings!  
[Cin.:] And ever the new I am flitting to find,  
With timorless body, and timorless mind.  
[Pei.:] We clasp Cinesias, man of linden-wyth.  
Why in the world have you whirled your splay foot hither?  
[Cin.:] To be a bird, a bird, I long,  
A nightingale of thrilling song.  
[Pei.:] O stop that singing; prithee<sup>57</sup> speak in prose.

**LS:** Yes. More literally, “Stop singing, but tell me what you mean.” In other words, his singing is not telling what<sup>58</sup> one thinks. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Cin.:] O give me wings, that I may soar on high,  
And pluck poetic fancies from the clouds,  
Wild as the whirling winds, and driving snows.  
[Pei.:] What, do you pluck your fancies from the clouds?  
[Cin.:] Why our whole noble<sup>xxxviii</sup> trade depends upon the clouds;  
What are our noblest dithyramps but things

<sup>xxxvi</sup> It is at this point that audio tape 6 begins. Strauss exchanges a few words with Mr. Edward. In the original transcript, this is the continuation of session 6 after the end of the first side of the tape.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Cinesias, an actual dithyrambic poet of the fifth and early fourth centuries BCE.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Rogers omits “noble.”

Of air, and mist, and purple-gleaming depths,  
 And feather<sup>xxxix</sup> whirlywings? You shall hear, and judge.  
 [Pei.:] No, no, I won't.  
 [Cin.:] By Heracles you shall.  
 I'll go through all the air, dear friend, for you.  
 Shadowy visions of  
 Wing-spreading, air-treading,  
 Taper-necked birds.  
 [Pei.:] Steady, there!  
 [Cin.:] Bounding along on the paths of the seas,<sup>xi</sup>  
 Fain would I float on the stream of the breeze.  
 [Pei.:] O by the Powers, I'll stop your streams and breezes.  
 [Cin.:] First do I stray on a southerly way;  
 Then to the northward my body I bear,  
 Cutting a harbourless furrow of air.  
 A nice trick that, a pleasant trick, old man.  
 [Pei.:] O, you don't like being a feathery-whirl-wing,<sup>xli</sup> do you?  
 [Cin.:] That's how you treat the Cyclian-chorus-trainer  
 For whose possession all the tribes compete!  
 [Pei.:] Well, will you stop and train a chorus here  
 For Leotrophides, all flying birds,  
 Crake-oppidians?<sup>xlii</sup>  
 [Cin.:] You're jeering me, that's plain.  
 But I won't stop, be sure of that, until  
 I get me wings, and peragate the air. (*Birds* 1372-1409)

**LS:** Let us stop here. The last phrase is not uninteresting: "peragate the air." Earlier he used a similar expression.<sup>59</sup> Does it remind you of something? He runs through the air. He walks and he runs [on the air]. The way he walks on the air. Well?

**Student:** Socrates.

**LS:** Socrates! There is a kinship between Cinesias, the poet, and Socrates. The poet takes the place of the astronomer, as is also indicated by the fact of the proper names. He wants to take new songs from the clouds: also Socratic, for the poets' art depends on the clouds. Socrates. Peisthetaerus invites him to stay. He is acceptable. Meton was not acceptable, the astronomer. But the poet doesn't wish to. He only came to get wings; he didn't wish to live there. He wants to live in a simple *polis*. And, as I say, his last words remind of Socrates walking on the air: *aerobatei*.<sup>xliii</sup> The *polis* cannot tolerate astronomy, just as it cannot tolerate beating the father

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<sup>xxxix</sup> Rogers has "feathery."

<sup>xi</sup> Rogers has "path to the seas."

<sup>xli</sup> Rogers has "feathery-whirl-winged."

<sup>xlii</sup> Rogers has "Crake-oppidans."

<sup>xliii</sup> This word appears twice in the *Clouds*, in the same sentence (*aerobatō kai periphronō ton hēlion*; "I tread the air and think about the sun") at lines 225 (Socrates) and 1503 (Strepsiades). It does not appear in the *Birds*, although Cinesias uses similar words or phrases: lines 1392 (*diemi . . . ton aera*: "I go through



and/or incest—connected. The city of birds is a universal democracy. It is a city of birds. A *human* society could not be universal. And a *human* society would need local gods, not these universal gods, the birds. And the Olympian gods are of course the simple Greek example for local gods. But even if a human society could be universal and hence get rid of the local gods, it could not get rid of the prohibition against incest, plus beating the parents; and *hence* it could not get rid of the prohibition against astronomy. Yes, they go together. Why? Why do the doubt of the prohibition against incest and astronomy go together? The gods, with all their grandeur and power and importance, are not the most fundamental phenomenon: this father-beating and/or incest is much more fundamental.<sup>60</sup> From that we must start if we want to understand the gods. Now what is the connection between the prohibition against astronomy and the prohibition against father-beating? I think we must answer that question before we can go on, but it was implied in almost everything I said. I wish some one of you would help me. What does the astronomer do?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, neither of them help the *polis*.

**LS:** That's too general. What does he positively do?

**Mr. Metzel:** The astronomer's interested in things which transcend the *polis*, which are beyond the *polis*, outside of the sphere of the *polis*.

**LS:** Yes, all right, but you have also people who do all kind of things which are not terribly necessary for the *polis* and you tolerate them nevertheless. And in every society I imagine people who do rather useless work. Ya? One could find them in all walks of life, I imagine, and they are not regarded as a danger to the city.

**Student:** . . . You mean the astronomy attempting to erect the *polis* on some sort of natural principles?

**LS:** That's it. The astronomers pry into secrets of heaven, the seats of the gods. Ya, that is one formula which one can say. But more fundamentally, they deal with the highest, most comprehensive, natural things. And by laying bare nature, they lay bare the distinction between nature and convention; and therefore they show that the foundation of the *polis* is a convention. Astronomy is the *instantia* for that human effort which destroys the sacred, which destroys the sacred by recognizing the conventional character of the sacred. Poetry, which is tolerated in contradistinction to astronomy, *defends* the sacred. Here Aristophanes does it all the time. Of which<sup>61</sup> [poetry] knows that it is not sacred, but it defends it. Poetry defends the sacred, of which it knows that it is weak as far as its *logos*, its foundation, is concerned. Yes,<sup>62</sup> so in the *Clouds*, the Unjust *Logos* was the strong *logos*; the Just *Logos* was the weak one. The poet knows that, and yet he takes its side.

The poets, very externally, present the gods. Here you say "Zeus is not," but he appears, or at least his brother Poseidon appears on the scene. Think of the Platonic dialogues. There are never

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the air"), 1393 (*aitherodromōn*: "running on the ether"), 1396 (*anemōn pnoaisi baiēn*: "I would step on the breaths of the winds"), and 1409 (*diadramō ton aera*: "I run through the air"). *Aerobatein* is also the word used by Socrates to describe his appearance in the *Clouds* in Plato, *Apology* 19c.

any gods who appear on the scene. The poets present the gods: they make the gods speak. That they make them also doubtful is true, but the philosophers never make them speak. The Olympian gods seem to be expendable. But given the need of the prohibition against incest, some gods are needed, be it only the birds. But there is a terrible secret behind that. The birds are the gods. The birds rule all humans in the whole universe. Who ruled the birds? Who?

**Student:** Peisthetaerus.

**LS:** To what species does he belong?

**Same Student:** Human.

**LS:** A human being ultimately controls the gods. Ya, but a superior fellow, obviously. Not everyone could do that.<sup>63</sup> As Rousseau said occasionally, “Not everyone can make the gods speak.”<sup>xliv</sup> Peisthetaerus, in his way, can do that.

In an entirely different context, something of this kind occurs in Plato’s *Republic*. There is the famous simile of the cave. The cave is, among other things, the *polis*. That is<sup>64</sup> a world in the world, a universe within the universe, with its basic opinions which constitute it. In the language of Plato’s *Republic*: the noble lies, which constitute the *polis* itself. And then<sup>65</sup> there is a little wall high above the cave, and statues of beings of superhuman size are carried around. The gods. But they are carried, and who carries them? Not the gods, but some human: the legislator.<sup>xlv</sup> And therefore the Platonic conclusion is: One has to seek for the *true* gods, for the gods which are not gods by convention. “The cosmic gods” is one expression for that.

The last speaker, the last of these potential immigrants, is a sycophant who is simply a dishonest fellow, a quite vulgar crook. And he’s just thrown out—I know that—whereas the first one, this very grave man who doubts whether one should not beat one’s father, is an honest man. An honest man. The sycophant is a vulgar crook, and [there is] no excuse for that. He cannot only be sent away, but he must be sent away with disgrace. Let us look at page 60, in the middle, verse 1433.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Sycophant:] “What can I do? I never learnt to dig.”

**LS:** In other words, what Mr. Luciano,<sup>xlvi</sup> I believe, also would say. You know? Or is this name not familiar to you? Well, who is now the most famous man in this field?<sup>66</sup> Some time ago, Mr. Hodge.<sup>xlvii</sup> But you know there are such people still around, only they are no longer called sycophants. Yes? Go on.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] O but, by Zeus, there’s many an honest calling

<sup>xliv</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right*, 2.7 (para. 116). Strauss’s translation.

<sup>xlv</sup> *Republic*, book 7, 514b-515a.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Perhaps gangster Lucky Luciano.

<sup>xlvii</sup> It is not clear to whom Strauss refers here.

Whence men like you can earn a livelihood,  
 By means more suitable than hatching suits.  
 [Syc.:] Come, come, no preaching; wing me, wing me, please.  
 [Pei.:] I wing you now by talking.

**LS:** Yes, but he wants wings in order to exercise his dirty business more efficiently. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] I wing you now by talking.  
 [Syc.:] What, by talk  
 Can you wing men?  
 [Pei.:] Undoubtedly. By talk  
 All men are winged.  
 [Syc.:] All!  
 [Pei.:] Have you never heard  
 The way the fathers in the barbers' shops  
 Talk to the children, saying things like these,  
*"Diitrephes has winged my youngster so  
 By specious talk, he's all for<sup>67</sup> chariot-driving."*  
*"Aye,"* says another, *"and that boy of mine  
 Flutters his wings at every Tragic Play."*  
 [Syc.:] So then by talk they are winged.

**LS:** "By speech" would be a proper translation. "Men are winged by speeches," yes? Does that make sense? Men are induced to move swiftly by speeches. Yes, go on.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] Exactly so.  
 Through talk the mind flutters and soars aloft,  
 And all the man takes wing. And so even now  
 I wish to turn you, winging you by talk,  
 To some more honest trade.  
 [Syc.:] But I *don't* wish.  
 [Pei.:] How then?  
 [Syc.:] I'll not disgrace my bringing up.  
 I'll ply the trade my father's fathers plied.  
 So wing me, please, with light quick-darting wings,  
 Falcon's or kestrel's, so I'll serve my writs  
 Abroad on strangers; then accuse them here;  
 Then dart back there again.  
 [Pei.:] I understand.  
 So when<sup>68</sup> they come, they'll find the suit decided,  
 And payment ordered.  
 [Syc.:] Right! you understand.  
 [Pei.:] And while they're sailing hither you'll fly there,  
 And seize their goods for payment.

[Syc.:] That's the trick!  
 Round like a top I'll whizz.  
 [Pei.:] I understand.  
 A whipping-top; and here by Zeus I've got  
 Fine Corcyraean wings to set you whizzing.  
 [Syc.:] O, it's a whip!<sup>69</sup> (1432-1464)

**LS:** Yes. Let us stop here. You see, there are two things which make men winged: speeches and whipping; the *logos* and sheer compulsion. That is a trite verity, but a very important verity. That is where the *logos* is too weak accidentally. Man has a good substitute for that,<sup>70</sup> which makes men winged. The sycophant, just as the beater of his father, is given a lesson in justice. But the sycophant refuses to accept it. The father's-beater is honest, just as Pheidippides in the *Clouds* was honest. Never forget that. His father was a crook. Pheidippides was not dishonest. The clear and simple use: the case of dishonesty or justice. Needing the *nomos*, because the sycophant couldn't exercise his profession without a law making it possible. How can you blackmail a man if there is not a law which makes certain crimes, crimes? Ya? So this is an ordinary criminal man who needs the law and transgresses it. All these gangsters need the law—if not accepting that law which they transgress, another one. That is a simple self-contradiction which has no leg whatever to stand upon, and these people, they don't see it, but they must be made to act; they must be winged by whipping. The simple injustice cannot be cured by speech, but only by whippings. Yes. If this is so, what then is justice? From this it would seem to follow that justice means respect for speeches. Yes? For consistency. And that is not bad at all, and that is part of Socrates's teaching. The man who respects the *logos* is a respectable man; and the dishonest man is the one who doesn't listen to the *logos* at all.

But there is here a difficulty. If the *logos* itself happens to be weak, as was suggested in the *Clouds*, a difficulty arises. Is there then not a need for some *ultimate* whipping behind the empirical whipping going on all the time by law courts, some ultimate force, some ultimate violence, simply laying down the law, although no proper *logos* for it can be given? That's the question. And that is the meaning.<sup>71</sup> If the bases of society are conventional,<sup>72</sup> then the ultimate basis of society is some force.

Now a few more comments. The scene goes a bit later. But yes, perhaps we can read this point briefly, immediately afterwards. The Chorus, where we left off, after the sycophant was driven out. Yes? The Chorus.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Ch.:] We've been flying, we've been flying  
 Over sea and land, espying  
 Many a wonder strange and new.  
 First, a tree of monstrous girth,  
 Tall and stout, yet nothing worth,  
 For 'tis rotten through and through;  
 It has got no heart, and we  
 Heard it called a<sup>xlviii</sup> "Cleonymus-tree."

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<sup>xlviii</sup> Rogers omits "a."

In the spring it blooms gigantic,  
 Fig-traducing, sycophantic,  
 Yet in falling leaf-time yields  
 Nothing but a fall of shields.  
 Next a spot by darkness skirted,  
 Spot, by every light deserted,  
 Lone and gloomy, we descried.  
 There the human and divine,  
 Men with heroes, mix and dine  
 Freely, save at even-tide.  
 'Tis not safe for mortal men  
 To encounter heroes there,<sup>xlix</sup>  
 Where<sup>l</sup> the great Orestes, looming  
 Vast and awful through the glooming,  
 With<sup>li</sup> their right a stroke delivering,  
 Leaves them palsied, stript, and shivering. (1470-1493)

**LS:** This Orestes was a robber<sup>73</sup> who appeared like a hero, like a revenant, in some out-of-the-way places, also something of which you know something from daily papers here in Chicago; and the other point they mentioned first was sycophant. You see? The birds describe what they see flying around the earth, as they see injustice of various kinds. That seems to be very trivial, but we have to think for one moment to see why it is not trivial. The simple thing is they *see* it: they do not *do* anything about it, just like the Olympian gods. Now here the final scene where the embassy from the gods appears—no, first Prometheus comes, afraid of Zeus, and he's greeted by Peisthetaerus as a friend. Peisthetaerus takes up the cause of Prometheus against the Olympian gods. There is also a reference to that, by the way, in Plato's *Banquet*, in Aristophanes's speeches there. The new and successful Prometheus is Peisthetaerus. What's the difference between Peisthetaerus and Prometheus, apart from the chronological difference?

**Student:** Prometheus is frightened stiff of Zeus, Peisthetaerus isn't.

**LS:** Yes,<sup>74</sup> that's true. But<sup>75</sup> to what species does Prometheus belong, and to what species does Peisthetaerus belong?

**Same Student:** Prometheus was a man. Peisthetaerus is a member of the new race that—

**LS:** Prometheus was not a man: he was a Titan. He was a god. So<sup>76</sup> the new and successful Prometheus<sup>lii</sup> is a human being, and that means, taking into consideration the end of the whole story—namely, that the gods have to give in; they have been starved to death and must give in—that the successor to Zeus is a human being, for Peisthetaerus, via the birds, rules everything.

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<sup>xlix</sup> Rogers has "then."

<sup>l</sup> Rogers has "Then."

<sup>li</sup> Rogers has "On."

<sup>lii</sup> I.e., Peisthetaerus.

One point which is not of general importance, which is of importance not in the play itself but in a broader context in the translation: page 66, bottom. That is verse 1606, following.

**Mr. Metzel:** Peisthetaerus?

**LS:** Yes.

**Mr. Metzel:**

[Pei.:] Aye, say you so? Why ye'll be mightier far,  
Ye Gods above, if Birds bear rule below.  
Now men go skulking underneath the clouds,  
And swear false oaths, and call the Gods to witness.  
But when ye've got the Birds for your allies,  
If man<sup>liii</sup> swear by the Raven and by Zeus,  
The Raven will come by, and unawares  
Fly up, and swoop, and peck the perjurer's eye out. (1606-1613)

**LS:** Yes. Do you remember the discussion of this problem in the *Clouds*? There was also one question in the crucial argument between Socrates and Strepsiades. After Socrates had disposed of the gods as causes of rain and other things, there still remained one preserve of the gods.

**Student:** Zeus's thunderbolts.

**LS:** Striking the perjurers. Here it is again. The gods don't do it. But the birds might do it. That's only to confirm my general thesis: there's a very close connection of these two.

**Mr. Metzel:** What is the connection with this and that last speech of the chorus, where the birds saw but did nothing about what they saw?

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Metzel:** When the birds saw—

**LS:** Yes, that's all right, but the birds *could* do it. There is a difference there. In fact, they don't do it. That's the difference. Because the gods are only by convention; they are not. The birds are living beings. Does that answer?

One point that I would like to mention: this scene where the birds [sing], which seems to be mere lyrical poetry inserted,<sup>77</sup> what the birds sing in the particular case has its meaning; for example, this passage which we read, the lyrical passage, where it is shown how they see the injustice on earth but don't do anything about it. There is a parallel there where they see not these two crooks, Orestes and the other fellow, but they see Socrates and Chaerephon, who are also ridiculed. But it is very important. Socrates and Chaerephon belong to a different parable than the crooks, which we know anyway, which is a minimal lesson we have been troubled with. Did you want to say something?

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<sup>liii</sup> Rogers has "a man."

**Mr. Gildin:** Yes. The birds seem to have a very good case. The only thing that troubled me was their claim to deathlessness. That seems simply preposterous.

**LS:** Ya, but they have to claim that if they want to be gods. I mean, that follows.<sup>78</sup> The men simply would not accept to worship a mortal being. I mean,<sup>79</sup> similar considerations apply to purely political considerations: if someone wants to be, say, the absolute ruler of a society he must raise certain claims, whether they are true or not.<sup>80</sup>

By the way, what is invested, the simple political shrewdness in the Aristophanean plays is absolutely amazing, and that of course can come out only with a close analysis. For example, I mention only that example of which I thought at first, that's the *Assembly of Women*. You know, again, a utopia. This time Athens submits to the rule of women, and with a certain amount of communism. So it's really very close in many respects to what is going on in the *Republic*. There are all kinds of difficulties there, you know, seeming contradictions; now you have really to think about it. And there is a discussion.<sup>81</sup> As usual, Aristophanes is not perfectly free from levity, to put it mildly, and there is one straight rule: the family is abolished. Every man may have intercourse with every woman, and vice versa. That's equality. But nature asserts itself. You have abolished all conventional inequalities: all are no longer rich and poor. But there is a natural inequality in this respect: some are attractive and some are unattractive; some are young and some are old. So here a *nomos*, a convention, has to come in and to equalize the condition. And therefore the rule is made: the unattractive ones have priority. Ya? You know, what nature denied them, the *nomos*, the law gives them, and that leads of course to very comic scenes of an old hag who asserts her priority, with great discomfort to everyone. [LS laughs]

But if you raise one question for one moment: Who benefits from that law, who really benefits from that law? Because<sup>82</sup> this is not a very nice scene, for the old hag to go down and have to fight and to make herself entirely ridiculous. And then you reach one conclusion: a young woman who married an old man. She has complied with the law already. It has given priority to the underdog, to the by-nature underprivileged, and then she doesn't commit adultery by having relations with a man of her age. Such a woman is the heroine. So the whole play is dramatically based on this notion, that in every revolution you have to raise the question: Who benefits from it? And that you have to do especially in the case of the leader of the revolution. Now that is in no place brought out, this simple reflection, but it is underlying the whole play. And so in the other plays too there is always, whenever the subject has anything with the *polis*, a political reflection is underlying the play. I don't know how I came to that. Some one of you raised a question?

**Mr. Gildin:** Deathlessness.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Gildin:** Deathlessness.

**LS:** Yes. It's political. You have to think of that. By the way, in the *Assembly of Women* there is a famous contradiction. She speaks first in the assembly of women—no, in a private assembly,

she speaks of the absolute novelty of this scheme, this leading revolutionary. And then in the assembly of women where they take the vote, she appeals to antiquity, that always the women were really the rulers. Well, the same thing: in a political argument, the appeal to precedent, antiquity, is essential; it goes through—and one must take this into consideration.<sup>83</sup> In this sense the plays are political, all of them, including the *Birds*.

**Mr. Gildin:** Yes, but who will that ever convince? I mean, that they can do all kinds of wonderful things for crops and so on, that's fairly plausible. But who will they ever convince that they never die? Am I being too literal?

**LS:** No. There is a famous American saying from Abraham Lincoln which all of you have heard more than once. Do you know what I mean?

**Mr. Gildin:** Yes.

**LS:** Say it.

**Mr. Gildin:** "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time."

**LS:** Ya, all right. Let us forget about the conclusion, which Aristophanes would admit. But all kinds of fooling, I mean, what is the meaning of propaganda as the word is used today?<sup>84</sup> If it were not massively incompatible with any form of Marxism in the most extreme interpretation, I have no doubt that you could—what they did with the brain of Lenin in Moscow, ya, you know this famous exhibition there. And what they did with this Lysenko<sup>liv</sup> business, that's a beautiful example. It is sure that the Soviet government can sell the idea that Lysenko's biology is right in the course of years. I mean, as Plato in his wisdom says in the *Republic*, in a discussion with Glaucon when the noble lie is under discussion, Glaucon says, "Yes, but people won't believe it," won't believe the noble lie. And then he goes on,<sup>85</sup> "But later generations might."<sup>86</sup> Socrates very delicately says, "I understand more or less what you mean," meaning<sup>87</sup> time has [an effect]. [That] is a terrific point. People hear that for generations. Things sound different. And<sup>88</sup> in addition, I would say in fairness, one must grant especially a comic poet's right to exaggerate a bit. After all, let us not forget that birds cannot speak, and that this preposterous impossibility is of course the basis of that legitimate comedy, a legitimate comedy writer. Now do we have a few minutes to state at least your problem, and I'll see whether we can discuss it. State your objection.

**Student:**<sup>lv</sup> First, I have to be sure I understand exactly what you've been doing. As I understand it, you're assuming first that there is a connection between the *Birds* and the *Clouds*, in that both

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<sup>liv</sup> Trofim Lysenko (1898-1976), Director of the Soviet Union's All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences, endorsed a new agricultural technique that was alleged to solve agricultural crises and famine. The technique ran counter to mainstream biological research in its rejection of Mendelian genetics. Lysenko denounced theoretical genetics and all biologists who did not hold his views, and banned genetic research in 1935. Leading geneticists were arrested and imprisoned. The ban on general research was lifted in 1964 when Lysenko retired.

<sup>lv</sup> Possibly Mr. Haight, to whose objections Strauss alluded at the beginning of the session.



of them deal with the nature of the *polis*, of the community, and Aristophanes is making propositions about the nature of the *polis*.

**LS:** Sure. That was my conclusion. First of all, I say he tells a story about birds being induced by an Athenian to take on the rule over the world. Naturally. But if we think about that and go back to the underlying clue, then we arrive at that. Yes, sure.

**Same Student:** Well, first I object to the connection between the *Clouds* and the *Birds*. Well, I'll start at the very bottom. I object to the whole idea that Aristophanes is saying something in either of these plays beyond what can be read on the surface.

**LS:** Sure. Absolutely correct, but the question is only that one must take the whole surface. I mean, you cannot [laughter]—you have to take every point. Sure. If you take the whole surface, meaning every speech, then you must account for every speech and for a conceit which makes every speech meaningful without having the recourse to fantastic assumptions.

**Same Student:** Well, let me get at that word “meaningful,” then. I, for a while, the first few days here, couldn't make up my mind whether you were using the plays of Aristophanes as illustrations for your own opinions on the subject or whether you meant to say that Aristophanes meant the conclusions that you drew from his plays.

**LS:** I can set your mind at rest on this much very easily. It would be criminal of me if I were to impute my opinions to Aristophanes and say they were Aristophanes's opinions. Sure, I believe in that. And I would say that this train of thought, which is not my opinion, but this train of thought which I learn from Aristophanes has one part of the great argument going on in classical times, to which Socrates, Plato, and Aristophanes are a reply.

**Same Student:** Well, as I started to say, again, this is just the first few days . . . the way you put it, but I don't believe this. I find it very difficult to believe that Aristophanes deliberately set out to illustrate or to compress the position into his plays. I think the illustrations of various positions or ideas or philosophies may appear in his plays, but they're there almost by accident. I think as a playwright, Aristophanes's first consideration was to present a picture of contemporary Athens, a mocking, ridiculous picture, but that his first consideration was: Is this true of Athens?

**LS:** That is of course an assertion which is, I believe, not provable. But if you say his first consideration was to make people laugh, I grant you that. I believe I said this last time. That is surely true. But the question is simply<sup>89</sup>—I mean, playwright or dramatist or comic poet, these are general concepts which cover a very great variety of phenomena. There may be a man who only likes to use a kind of buffoonery, makes a kind of buffoonery. Undoubtedly you have seen George Gobel,<sup>lvi</sup> or Groucho Marx, or other individuals of this kind: you have plenty of opportunity to laugh. They do want nothing but that, but there are also comic poets who want more.

Now<sup>90</sup> my starting point of any argument would be what—since the comic poet, like Aristophanes, given the conventions of that time was free to speak in his own name in the

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<sup>lvi</sup> George Gobel (1919-1991), American comic actor and star of his own television program in the 1950s.

*parabasis* of what he was doing, we have to start from that. In the case of the dramatic tragic poets it's much more difficult, because they never speak in their own names. Now in there Aristophanes says he wants to do two things: to make people laugh and to teach them justice. And any argument on Aristophanes which wants to be solid, scholarly, scientific, whatever you call it, has to start from that.<sup>91</sup> And the fact that constant references to contemporary Athens occur must be understood in the light of these two principles: ridiculous and just. To teach justice by ridicule or to make people laugh by means of presentations of the problem of justice. That is not decided by the general statement. It has to wait. And<sup>92</sup> everyone is free to believe or not to believe, and that is not the point. But I think<sup>93</sup> any argument which is valuable is one which enters into the details. I mean, I don't claim to have understood the whole of Aristophanes. We have today a good example, where Mr. Heberlou, who has read Aristophanes less than I, I believe—yes?

**Mr. Heberlou:** Much less.

**LS:** Much less. And found something which I overlooked, and of some, you know, great importance, because it clears [a] great difficulty, and . . . But I would say, I can only say, this: of the interpretations I have read or heard, I think that the overall view I suggest explains more than the alternatives do. What I do not know and what I have to find out by hard work is whether it explains, at least in principle, everything. Because, you see, our belief and nonbelief depends to a considerable extent on our earlier opinions, on our preconceived opinions, and that is of course, as you must admit, not solid. So if you<sup>94</sup> show me a given point where I say something, where I interpreted a certain speech wrongly, then I will be delighted and immediately embody it into my interpretation. But this is too vague to make an impression.

**Student:** That's an excellent criticism. I hope I won't bog down the class in a veritable swamp of trivia, but I have a list of things here that I object to. I object to them on the grounds that I gave before, that I think Aristophanes put them in, as a playwright, from two points of view: either as jokes or simply because they represented contemporary Athens. That is, there are ideas he attacks in his plays, but I think he put them there not because he was mounting a concentrated attack on a well-meant philosophy but simply that he was plucking ideas out of Athenian life and attacking them peacefully.

**LS:** Yes, but still they must make some meaning. I mean, when you take the *Clouds* and you have here, quite externally, Socrates asserting or at least abetting atrocious things, and meeting a terrible end, that can be understood and must be understood at first glance as a critique of Socrates. Something was wrong with Socrates. Otherwise it would not be ridiculous. You know, a simply good and noble action, and a simply good and noble way of life can never be ridiculous. So I think it is generally admitted that the *Clouds* is something like an attack on Socrates. The question only is: What are the . . . terms of the attack?

Here in this play you have an Athenian who<sup>95</sup> has only one quality which would fall into very severe notions of that time, even be regarded as a blemish, namely, his pederasty, but [who] otherwise is presented as an absolutely sensible man. You see, for example, the scene with the father-beater and the scene with the sycophant. A man who has sensible moral principles does something outrageous to the gods and he succeeds. He succeeds. That must be interpreted. I

mean, Peisthetaerus is not held up as a wicked destroyer of the paternal order, of the ancestral order. On the contrary. And similar conventions are a part of *The Peace*. They offer, as a kind of rebellion against the gods, a man, an Athenian, ascends to heaven and brings peace to Hellas; whereas if Zeus had been right, the war had gone on and on and on. I mean, to say merely that Aristophanes was in favor of peace and against the continuation of this fratricidal war is true, but it is linked up here with the assertion that Zeus is very inactive and the human being has to do it. The human being—that one can show by the name of it—is really the comic poet himself. And so the comic poet will do what Zeus himself will not. You have to take these things into consideration.

In addition, I mean, all the words which you use are really in need of reflection. For example, idea. When you take a man like Bernard Shaw, and there were writers around—say, Bergson—and he was influenced by them, then we understand more or less what that means. A playwright, or a novelist for that matter, happens to be influenced by the theoretical men of his time; and he partly, really partly believes them, and partly also he uses them without believing them because he can use them for characterizing his characters. That is one way of doing it. But whether and to what extent Aristophanes merely used these opinions in the air for characterizing individuals, and to what extent he himself accepted these views, is a question. You cannot leave this question open because the alternatives are limited. I mean, if he believed in the Olympian gods, which means he would have rejected these new kinds of gods altogether, that would show, as these presentations do not make much sense as the work of someone who believed in Olympian gods.

I disregard here completely another consideration, which I do not regard as trivial but one could object to<sup>96</sup> [it] on certain sensible grounds. We have a presentation of Aristophanes's work as a whole in four pages in Plato's *Banquet*. Now Plato knew everything about the contemporary scene, and infinitely more than anyone can know today. I mean, this kind of thing is clear. But I can only say that, without having paid any attention to the Platonic analysis regarding this presentation, I came to a view which I was surprised to see is borne out by what Plato says in the *Banquet* about Aristophanes. But the only concrete way is concrete argument, this or that particular point; and you have to consider both the individual speeches, and naturally also the Chorus, as well as the action and the meaning of the play as a whole, the plot as a whole.

**Same Student:** Well, it is the meaning of the play as a whole that I object to.<sup>97</sup> In summary—

**LS:** Say the plot, say the plot.

**Same Student:** In summary, my position is that you're attributing too much consistency to Aristophanes as a proponent of a point of view. Take, on page 48, in the speech of the Chorus:

[Ch.:] Listen to the City's notice, specially proclaimed to-day;  
*Sirs, Diagoras the Melian whosoever of you slay,*  
*Shall receive, reward, one talent; and another we'll bestow*  
*If you slay some ancient tyrant, dead and buried long ago.* (1071-1075)

Now if I've got my notes right, since I wrote so fast, you said that this contained the proposition that heresy and tyranny are not allowable in the ideal city. And if I understand the way you're

approaching this properly, you mean to say he put that proposition in there purposely. He meant specifically—

**LS:** Ya, he must—I would say this: If such actions were taken by the city of Athens. If he ascribes these acts to the city of birds, it must make some meaning as an act of the city of birds. Of course he could be a silly buffoon who just makes jokes whether they have meaning or not, but to the extent to which I know Aristophanes, I think he was a very thoughtful man. So<sup>98</sup> it was not so that he merely could not repress a joke, but it must have some meaning in the context. It makes perfect sense, in the whole of the play, that however different this new city of the birds may be, it still has certain features in common with all cities of which we know, and the prohibition against tyranny, as well as the prohibition against atheism, applies equally there. I mean, it seems to be confirmed by the whole. There are, after all, new gods, so there is no atheism. And tyranny goes without saying. A democracy, or even an aristocracy, cannot tolerate tyrants.

**Same Student:** There are a good many of these points in here that you bring out, and some that I object to where I can't say that what you draw out of them is wrong. For example, about the father-beater being a law-abiding man. Yes, he is presented as such. Still, I just object to the idea that this is intended. Now in this speech of the Chorus—

**LS:** But why should he do that? Why should he present an individual regarded by the normal man as obnoxious, just as a sycophant is obnoxious? The sycophant he presented just as everyone would expect it, as a crook, as a despicable individual whom he treats as a despicable individual. But here he has another kind of crime, beating the father,<sup>99</sup> or a man who desires to beat his father; and he treats him differently, and this fellow proves to be different. What may he do in the name of poetry, I would say. I mean, is a poet a thoughtless man? Must he be? I don't believe so; there are some, but no good poet.

**Same Student:** I don't believe Aristophanes was a thoughtless man. I'm not saying he is.

**LS:** Yes, but then he would be thoughtless.

**Same Student:** I'm saying that there are dramatic reasons, reasons why Aristophanes the playwright—

**LS:** Yes, but what does "dramatic reason," in concrete terms, mean? In other words, how do you interpret this particular passage?<sup>100</sup> I mean, those are general words. If you say "dramatic reasons," meaning there is a certain plot, a certain overall idea, and this has in itself consequences which explain a given thing, and you don't have to refer to anything else, then maybe so. If you call that a dramatic reason, that's fine.<sup>101</sup> Granting that it was necessary to show the city as an attraction, and therefore potential immigrants, he still has to start with the questions: What kind of immigrants is he going to choose? And how will they be treated, and to whom will he give a proper name and to whom he will not give a proper name? These were new decisions, special decisions, which must be examined.

**Same Student:** I think in each of these cases I can think of a dramatic reason why he chose this way of putting it.

**LS:** May I make this suggestion? Of course we must now finish . . . Can you put them down in writing and hand them to me next time?

**Same Student:** All right.

**LS:** Good.

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted “we begin.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “the whole—.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “If we could get some—.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “Now.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted: “political.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “—in Aristophanes.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “Because—.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “philosophers.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “I would—.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “or this—what Plato.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “—if it is not—yes, in the actual *polis*, these seven.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “that in—.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “Do they—.”

<sup>14</sup> Moved “his.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “a legal assumption.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “what—.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “that is—I mean.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “this—.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “Two Athenians—.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “can live—.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “which—.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “—that is the first.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “Generate—.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “And that limit—.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “and out—but.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “that is—.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “If you—.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “a beautiful—.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “That’s—.”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “Invent some—.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “he is no—.”

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “It is—.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “What is—.”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted “Meton—.”

<sup>35</sup> Deleted “he was an actual—.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “is beating.”

<sup>37</sup> Deleted “Meton, and that is something else which reminds us of—.”

<sup>38</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “makes—.”

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “, however—well.”

<sup>41</sup> Deleted “we.”

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “so, the first—.”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “untolerable.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “and.”

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- <sup>45</sup> Deleted "What conclusion—."  
<sup>46</sup> Deleted "which—."  
<sup>47</sup> Deleted "If Zeus—."  
<sup>48</sup> Deleted "And you will find it—."  
<sup>49</sup> Deleted "*fledglings*—."  
<sup>50</sup> Deleted "*in their tur*—."  
<sup>51</sup> Deleted "you—."  
<sup>52</sup> Deleted "killing—."  
<sup>53</sup> Deleted "Mr.—."  
<sup>54</sup> Deleted "are not—."  
<sup>55</sup> Deleted "That at least—."  
<sup>56</sup> Deleted "What is—."  
<sup>57</sup> Deleted "talk—."  
<sup>58</sup> Deleted "one."  
<sup>59</sup> Deleted "What does it—."  
<sup>60</sup> Deleted "That is—."  
<sup>61</sup> Deleted "it."  
<sup>62</sup> Deleted "you know,."  
<sup>63</sup> Deleted "Not—."  
<sup>64</sup> Deleted "something—."  
<sup>65</sup> Deleted "there are—."  
<sup>66</sup> Deleted "which."  
<sup>67</sup> Deleted "chariot-racing—."  
<sup>68</sup> Deleted "they are—."  
<sup>69</sup> Deleted "Nay—."  
<sup>70</sup> Deleted "and this is—."  
<sup>71</sup> Deleted "If there are ultimate—."  
<sup>72</sup> Deleted "then only—."  
<sup>73</sup> Deleted "and."  
<sup>74</sup> Deleted "but—."  
<sup>75</sup> Deleted "what is—."  
<sup>76</sup> Deleted "a human being—."  
<sup>77</sup> Deleted "which has of course a mere—."  
<sup>78</sup> Deleted "I mean,."  
<sup>79</sup> Deleted "once you—."  
<sup>80</sup> Deleted "I think that is—The political—."  
<sup>81</sup> Deleted "It is—."  
<sup>82</sup> Deleted "that is not very—."  
<sup>83</sup> Deleted "Not that this is—that is—."  
<sup>84</sup> Deleted "Except—I mean, I'm sure that."  
<sup>85</sup> Deleted "he says,."  
<sup>86</sup> Deleted "And."  
<sup>87</sup> Deleted ", well,."  
<sup>88</sup> Deleted "we must—."  
<sup>89</sup> Deleted "—there are—."  
<sup>90</sup> Deleted "and."  
<sup>91</sup> Deleted "And no further—."  
<sup>92</sup> Deleted "one can—one—I mean, this kind is perfectly—."  
<sup>93</sup> Deleted "one must simply—."  
<sup>94</sup> Deleted "don't."  
<sup>95</sup> Deleted "is—."  
<sup>96</sup> Deleted "them."  
<sup>97</sup> Deleted "I—."  
<sup>98</sup> Deleted "he did not make—."  
<sup>99</sup> Deleted ", and he treats him—."  
<sup>100</sup> Deleted "What does—."

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<sup>101</sup> Deleted “But you cannot give such a.”

## Session 7: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —brought up quite a few very important features. Your interpretation does not quite jibe with the one which I'm going to suggest, and therefore implicitly it contains a criticism, by anticipation of what I'm going to say.<sup>i</sup> But I must say this kind of criticism is really helpful because it is concrete, and we must see whether I can account for everything you said and whether you can account for everything I have to take up.

Now to indicate a few points: you say, quite rightly, the attack on Cleon is incidental. I retract my words of praise. You said: "The Cleon . . . is incidental." That is not the overall theme; that is surely true. But it is not incidental, as is indicated by the names of the two chief characters: lover of Cleon, abhorrer of Cleon. Ya? And you know, at a crucial moment the lover of Cleon and the dicasts call for Cleon to come—they send boys to fetch him. Ya? And he seems to be the only one who can save the situation for the dicasts. And Cleon never comes. So the absence of Cleon is a very important feature of the play. But one can say it is a play dealing with Cleon, but with Cleon's absence. And we must find out what that means. That is one point.

The other point, what you say is perfectly correct, the attack on the degenerate democracy in the light of the good old times, the old Athens, and the dicasts as fighters for Athens, defenders of Athens, that is unblameable. Surely. But the question is whether that is the whole story, you know, the praise of the [old times], and what you said about the last scenes indicate that there is something else. This business there—which is in the Jewish sense a cure—are all novel things, so that, in other words, the cure for the present decay is not simply a return to the old things but new remedies are needed, and we have to identify these new remedies. Ya? That would be our problem.

To mention a few other points: you made very clear, and that is crucial for the understanding, that Philocleon, the hero dicast, radically differs from his fellow dicasts. I mean, the word dicast is comparable with, let's say, "juryman." The hero juryman is radically different from the other jurymen. You say he is mad. Very good. But the poet is more specific. He identifies that madness. What kind of madness is it from which he suffers?

And the last point which I would like to make now only is this. At the beginning, in the first four or five hundred verses or so, you said Bdelycleon is restraining his father. I believe that was the word. But can you spell this out, this "restraining," a little bit? You laugh. What? You seem to have the answer. Don't hold back. What does he do?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, this thing sounds a good deal, like the laws of the storks, this point.

**LS:** Laws?

**Mr. Metzel:** The storks' laws in the *Birds*.

**LS:** You mean in what way?

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<sup>i</sup> Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.



**Mr. Metzel:** Well, he's restraining by all kinds of devices, but it includes beating his father.

**LS:** It includes?

**Mr. Metzel:** It includes beating his father.

**LS:** I think so. At least he uses force.

**Mr. Metzel:** He does beat him. He kicks him down the chimney at one point, although he's taking care of him, like the story says.

**LS:** Yes. And even if he asks the slaves to beat him, the father, it's bad enough. So that was the point which you omitted, but that doesn't detract from the quality of your paper. In other words, we have here another case of this problem of beating the father, or may I suggest the simpler formula: he keeps his father a prisoner. He keeps him bound or fettered. He binds his father. He does to his father what Zeus did to his father, Cronos. So the great problems of beating the father, which we have seen in two Aristophanean plays before, play a role here too. And as far as my present recollection goes, these are the [only] three<sup>1</sup> plays of Aristophanes which deal with this subject, and we have to take account of it. But, so my criticism of you, of your paper is this: it was a very good and clear paper and you have seen quite a few important points, but there are other important points for which you did not account and we must integrate what you have found into a larger framework which also will account for the things omitted. Does this make sense as a rule of reading such a work?

**Student:**<sup>ii</sup> But how much can you say in seven pages? [Laughter]

**LS:** Yes, sure. I repeat, your paper was very satisfactory, and especially if I consider that you did it at very short notice. Ya? And in addition, it was probably the first time you read a play of Aristophanes, or this play, at any rate. Is this fair?

**Same Student:** Yes.

**LS:** Yes.<sup>2</sup> I mean, you will get a very good grade; you don't have to worry about that. [Laughter] I'm not now concerned with this kind of administrative matters, but only because now I'm planning to turn to our general free-for-all.

**Same Student:** I would just like to make one comment in the light of the particular way you treat it.<sup>3</sup> I plead guilty. I picked out what I thought was most important.

**LS:** I'm sure you did, and you did very well.

**Same Student:** But there are other—I mean, it was impossible to do a complete interpretation.

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<sup>ii</sup> Author of the paper (not Mr. Metzel).

**LS:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, you are perfectly innocent. [Laughter] I'm now concerned, not with guilt, I'm concerned with an invisible adversary because Mr. Haight isn't here, [laughter] but also with other invisible adversaries, other people whom I don't know and who don't know me, and who study such works differently. And therefore I use this opportunity which you so graciously gave me for stating one general rule of reading: that if you are confronted with a variety of interpretations, that is preferable which accounts for most. Ya? Or for more than other interpretations. That's all. And you don't have to worry at all.

Now let me come back and<sup>4</sup> initiate this discussion. Now the first condition for understanding anything, whether it is the American preparation for the coming presidential elections, or Plato or Hobbes or whatever have you, is open-mindedness. The facts, the data, in their purity must be seen and admitted and not denied and manipulated. Surely there are different kinds of data. There is, for example, the observation of how Mr. Miller voted in '56 and '52, and '48, when he voted for the first time, perhaps, and how he's going to vote in 1960. But there are also broader things: how a whole area of the country votes, or a whole professional group over this country.<sup>5</sup> Or to apply it to our case: the individual speech of a character—here, this one line, or the *plot* of the comedy. These are both facts, but facts of a different caliber, of different quality. So that is clear. The facts.

But then we come to the famous fact that everyone approaches a fact with some previous opinion. He doesn't have to have an opinion about Aristophanes, for example. He may not have any opinion. He may never have heard the name. But he has some opinions which bear on Aristophanes before he even opens the book. Let us take such an opinion, a very simple example: poetry. I mean, everyone who opens such a book has heard the word poetry and subsumes this under poetry, and that is a very grave act. An inevitable act, but a grave one. Now what is poetry? I mean, there are certain innocent things which are safe to say. For example,<sup>6</sup> meter and/or rhyme. In other words, poetry is noncolloquial speech, not prosaic speech. That is clear. And it is also clear that given the origin of the word—*poēsis*—poetry. *Poēsis*: making, something made, something invented, something fictitious. Even in the case of the delicate poet, where the poet as individual, [e.g.], Mr. Miller, expresses his love for Miss Smith, or his mourning for the death of his grandmother, for example, what makes it a poem is that which *transcends* it[s] being an expression of Mr. Miller's love for Miss Smith, and therefore there is always something fictitious about it. That is the old meaning of poetry. But today this has rather disappeared, and instead we use words like "creative." I mean, I know that people regard writing a master's thesis<sup>7</sup> or writing a social science book as creative work; I have heard that. But still, the more general use is to apply it to poetry in particular, or some other arts. Or we use the word "aesthetic": for example, aesthetic experience. Now these innocent-looking facts contain whole worlds, you know, a whole world which may distort completely<sup>8</sup> what we are trying to understand. The least we must grant, everyone must grant, is this: there may be a disproportion<sup>9</sup> between our previous opinion—for example, regarding poetry—and the opinion of the poet. We cannot assume that Aristophanes understood by poetry what we understand by that. That seems to be elementary but is not always considered.

Now this, what I call "previous opinions," is akin to what is now called hypotheses, but not the same. Let us make clear this difference so that we understand a bit the insidious character of previous opinions. What is a hypothesis? I mean, you must hear in many courses in this

building<sup>iii</sup> sophisticated expositions of what a hypothesis is. I have never heard such courses, but I can figure out more or less what they must mean. What is a hypothesis? Well. Let me make a stab in the dark. I would say a hypothesis is an assumption which is known to be assumption, number one. Yes? Second, its terms are meant to be perfectly clear and distinct. A hypothesis is completely known as what it is. The question is whether it is true or not, and<sup>10</sup> there are certain methods by which we validate or invalidate the hypothesis. But the hypothesis itself is lucidity itself, as hypothesis. I can imagine that there are sometimes hypotheses which are stated in terms of shocking ambiguity and a lack of lucidity, but that is a bad hypothesis. A hypothesis as such is of perfect lucidity. But hypotheses, and that is also known in the profession, have a prehistory in every case, or a background.<sup>11</sup> For example, why does Mr. X indulge in this particular kind of hypothesis, whereas Mr. Y in that other kind?<sup>12</sup> And the common answer is: Well, you have to know the psychology of these men. He, X, underwent psychoanalytical treatment and Y did not. Y was originally a businessman, and therefore—whatever. This kind of thing. So<sup>13</sup> in other words, we have a whole science which tells us something about the only thing which is unclear in our hypothesis, namely, their prehistory. The hypothesis is lucidity itself, but it stems from a vague and unclear medium: the soul, as it is called, a word which is so rejected because of<sup>14</sup> the murkiness to which it seems to allude. But the trouble is, with this psychological explanation, that psychology itself rests on hypotheses, scientific, etc., and then we get again back into this unclear prehistory of the hypothesis. So hypotheses really are very good and satisfactory only in the [foreground]. And that includes the validation and invalidation of hypotheses. That is wonderful, but only on the foreground.

There is a dark background in every case. That is the home of the previous opinions. The previous opinions are deeper and for the same reason murkier than any hypothesis can be. And that makes it so hard and at the same time so important to reach clarity about them. There are certain social scientists who are of an admirable optimism and naiveté. They think if they write on page one of their preface, “These are my values”—ya, you know, I know such people—and then they have clarified the problem of their previous opinions. But this is only a very shallow formulation of what they *believe* they believe. It is not a real understanding of what they believe. So in fact every understanding is a constant movement back and forth between the data (for example, a verse or an election campaign) and the presuppositions, the hidden presuppositions. And this constant movement back and forth is meant to lead to a clarification of these presuppositions, not only to the validation and invalidation of the hypothesis, and possibly, if we are lucky, to correction of our presuppositions, of our previous opinions.

Now then we have to do that with poetry, at least to some extent and very superficially, but only the first few indispensable steps. And let us really not be ashamed of being childlike. The older view of poetry was supposed to have two functions: to please—never forget that, to please. I mean, you know that there is a certain kind of art now in existence which may have wonderful qualities but of which no one can say that it could please. Ya? Now that’s a great change. So to please, but not only to please but also to be useful. That was the old-fashioned view of old-fashioned people. For example, Horace expressed that, but that goes back to much earlier. To please, that is not quite serious. It’s a play. It’s a play. To be useful, that’s serious. For example, if we learn something about the virtues of patriotism, that’s useful, serious. But that we are amused by the antics of an old drunkard who comes out with a flute-girl and some dubious

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<sup>iii</sup> The Social Science Research building at the University of Chicago.

prehistory, that's funny, pleasing. But these two elements, to please and to be useful, to be playful and to be serious, are related. They are not just coexistent: they have an inner unity. There is one kind of human activity which has this quality of being playful and serious, of being<sup>15</sup> [playful] and useful together, inextricably. Don't say a cocktail party [laughter], because they are really clearly separated, because a fellow [who] goes to a cocktail party to meet there a VIP does two entirely different things which happen to coincide: that the VIP happens to drink there and he can meet him. And that is good. But there is one in which they are united.

How does one call these things which are both useful and playful, enjoyable, a boon for the senses? Now this was formerly, as I can still intelligibly say, something festive. When you look, for example, at a commencement, there you see this combination of the useful—the conclusion of the academic year, the graduation, you know, that must be formally recognized—and at the same time, you don't go there trembling: Are you well prepared, and this kind of thing. It is festive. Festive. Let us say the festive is the natural union of the pleasing and useful. Festive: that reminds us of festivals. Festivals, holidays, if we remember the origin of the meaning of holidays, which is in English so very clear: holy days. Holy days, days dedicated to the worship of the gods. That is indeed<sup>16</sup> pleasing. I'm speaking now of course more from a Greek than from a biblical point of view, although even from a biblical point of view one can recognize it. This is a holiday. If that is true, the so-called divine apparatus which we find in Homer and Aristophanes and the tragic poets is of the essence of poetry. Poetry without a divine apparatus is a problem, not the poetry with it. That is a great question, how poetry without a divine apparatus, if I may use that term, could come into being. That required an amazing change, which is of course partly implied in what such people as Aristophanes and Sophocles did but it is not yet there.

Now let us<sup>17</sup> turn to Aristophanes. That Aristophanes is concerned with divine things is obvious from the plays, but we have in addition Socrates's remark to Aristophanes in Plato's *Banquet*, that Aristophanes deals with nothing but Dionysus and Aphrodite, the god of wine and<sup>18</sup> the goddess of love. Wine and Love.<sup>iv</sup> That is indeed<sup>19</sup> very characteristic of Aristophanes (of a certain kind of poet, not of all) that these two gods, Dionysus and Aphrodite—Wine and Love, both with a capital letter—are his concern. Wine and Love have this in common: the joy of life, the throwing off of all burdens, all restraints. Carnival is the closest, best approximation to what the comic means. Carnival: throwing off the burdens not only of work but even of decency. Decency also can be a burden, as you may know if you have read books on the education of little children. You have to be told the most elementary rules of decency, of which one could not imagine that man was not born with full knowledge of them.

Now let us then<sup>20</sup> here come back to what I said last time, only changing a bit: What are these fears of indecency which are so important to Aristophanes? Obscenity proper, politics, blasphemy. But another point which I simply forgot to mention last time, which is also important: parody. Parody especially of tragedy, of solemn tragedy. Solemnity is also a burden, just as a black tie may be a burden.<sup>21</sup> In other words, what we see in Aristophanes throughout is an exhilarating festivity which is connected with Dionysus and Aphrodite: this work of the comic poet, that he exhilarates us festively and not like a mere buffoon, and that this has always to do with recollections of Dionysus and Aphrodite in the *hierus* [that is, the sacred]. No women there, as far as we know. Only adult males.

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<sup>iv</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 177d-e.

Now this work of the comic poet is in itself independent of whether the comic poet believes that Dionysus and Aphrodite exist or do not exist. That could be done<sup>22</sup> without going now into any details, but at first blush such a work could have been produced by someone who thinks Dionysus and Aphrodite are in the way in which they are believed to be, or<sup>23</sup> [by someone who] does not believe. He might be a man who does not even care whether they exist or not. Some bright idea occurs to him: how one can produce this festive exhilaration and a wonderful plot, amusing plot, and all this kind of thing—wonderful scenes and, well, let others worry about these questions. Or he might not do that. In other words, he might be merely a craftsman in this particular craft of comedy. In that case, he would not be a wise man as the Greeks understood wisdom. The problem I had with Mr. Haight last time turned only around this point. I mean, if it were properly understood, properly phrased only around that; namely, I seemed to assume that Aristophanes had worried whether Dionysus and Aphrodite, and of course Zeus and Hera too, are or are not, whereas he regarded this as a wholly unfounded assumption. I do not know whether he would agree with my . . . but that is my impression.<sup>24</sup>

However, this question cannot be decided by any fiat or preference. We have to investigate. What we can say on the basis of what we have seen<sup>25</sup> are two questions: Was Aristophanes aware of this question regarding the existence of the gods and of the importance of this question?<sup>26</sup> Are we here in a position to answer this question on the basis of what we have read? And<sup>27</sup> whatever you say, give your reason. Can we answer the question that Aristophanes was aware that this is a question, whether Dionysus and Aphrodite exist or do not exist, and that this is a question, a great question? What would you seem to say? What?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, I think he was aware of it in that he is constantly talking about the people's criticism of god. A desire, for instance, as in the *Birds*, to establish new gods, or to be in a society where the gods are not observed in this manner or do not exist in the same way.<sup>28</sup> Also he seems to be aware—at least, he seems to have said<sup>29</sup> that god is a creation of man. He said this again and again.

**LS:** Ya, does he say that?

**Mr. Metzel:** He doesn't say it, but it's implied, I think—

**LS:** Yes, now<sup>30</sup> you see, because as we learned from the *Wasps*, we must hear also the other side. In this case, the invisible Mr. Haight. Ya? We must take up his position, in fairness to him and to ourselves. Now I would say, can you quote chapter and verse which would settle this question? And to repeat: Was Aristophanes aware of the question regarding the existence or nonexistence of the gods and of the importance of this question? Do *you* have an answer, Mr. Kennedy? You smile.

**Mr. Kennedy:** Well, the *Clouds*.

**LS:** Yes.

**Mr. Kennedy:** “Zeus is not.”<sup>v</sup>

**LS:** Sure. That verse alone would settle it.<sup>31</sup> He presents Socrates as saying “*ouk esti Zeus*.”<sup>vi</sup> “Zeus does not even exist” would be the correct translation in the context. In other words, this Zeus, of whom you say all these—you praise so highly, he does not have this minimum of virtue, which consists in mere existence, surely. And then, that this is a great issue is indicated by the whole play. It ends with the fact that Socrates’s think tank is burned down because he had been arrogant, insolent again towards the gods. So that is clear. This question wasn’t<sup>vii</sup> [unknown to him], and his own work showed it.

But now we come to the real question. Did Aristophanes himself answer this question regarding the existence of the gods one way or another? That is a much more difficult question. After all, the poet never speaks in his own name except in the *parabasis*. Then the chorus speaks, at least partly, in the poet’s name, and there these statements never occur. There are some slight exceptions to what I said, but that’s not necessary. So therefore that is really a question<sup>32</sup> where opinions may very well differ and where the solution can only be found by these broad considerations; in other words, which interpretation can account for everything occurring in the plays and which can account only for half of it. Now this is my statement of the problem. I call now on Mr. Schrock to state his objection, difficulty, or however he might call it.

**Mr. Schrock:** I think that I gave the impression that I had a more substantial position than I really did. I talked to Mr. Gildin afterwards, and my question was merely that of the novelist. It has nothing to do with any specific portion of the play and therefore suffers from the same generality—

**LS:** Yes, but state it nevertheless, because what you said to Mr. Gildin in private is not knowable to us here.

**Mr. Schrock:** Well, it is merely, I think, a restatement of the obvious: that is, that you can’t know whether a poet or philosopher was aware of problems or raised questions until you examine the writing.<sup>33</sup> When we started with the *Banquet*, you gave us a rule of thumb: that there is very little of superfluity in Plato.

**LS:** Very little what?

**Mr. Schrock:** Very little superfluous in Plato. Everything has a purpose and counts.

**LS:** Yes, as a rule of thumb, I would even say nothing is superfluous.

**Mr. Schrock:** Well, the assumption seems to be about the same with Aristophanes.

**LS:** Ya. But you must have seen also from my present exposition that I did not make this assumption. In other words<sup>34</sup>—very well. Now you bring up the crucial point, the real difficulty

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<sup>v</sup> *Clouds* 367.

<sup>vi</sup> The Greek original is actually *oud’ esti Zeus*, although the sense is the same.

<sup>vii</sup> There is a brief gap in the audio.

which also, I believe, must underline Mr. Haight's objections. We have a certain notion of what poetry is, what writing is, what books are, quite naturally. Through a number of observations, I have been led to believe that up to a certain time in the past, say, partly beyond 1800, there were a number of great writers (not all great, but a considerable number of great writers) who wrote not only with great care (I believe there are today even people who write with great care), but with what from today's point of view could only be called excessive care. Yes? . . . This possibility has to be considered; there might have been [such people]. Whether a given author, say, Aristophanes, has to be subsumed under the group of writers with excessive care, or only writers with ordinary care, is an empirical question. For which [. . .]<sup>viii</sup>—absolutely, absolutely. Now if you resolved that I approached him with a prejudice that he is one of these writers with excessive care, you were right, as a matter of fact. Ya? But that is an objection to me. But it was not—how should I say?—a thoughtless prejudice. I mean,<sup>35</sup> you know some people have a notion of applying universals. Yes? Like “hair,” you know, for . . . apply to bald people as well as those who have plenty of hair and don't need it. And I can tell you the reason, the reason for the way in which I can know . . . Aristophanes from Plato. That was one major point. But surely, to begin with, everyone is entitled to say that means nothing, you know: the poet simply followed him.

But then you get into certain difficulties. To mention only one which occurs to me at the moment, we have these two scenes at the end of the *Birds*. You know? First, when they come to the sacrifice, to the founding scene; and then when the immigrants come in. And in each case there is only one with a proper name: in the first case an astronomer, and in the second case a poet. And I raised the question: Should this be entirely an accident? Does he not indicate something regarding the special importance of astronomers on the one hand and poets on the other? And then I remembered the following fact: that Aristophanes wrote two plays dealing with the persecution of astronomers on the one hand and poets on the other. Because as you know, the astronomers are of course—[the] *Clouds*, ya? Socrates is presented there as an astronomer. Philosophy and astronomy: that is the same thing. And there is another play called the *Thesmophoriazusae*, where a *poet* is persecuted: Euripides. In the one case, the persecution ends with the destruction, at least of the dwelling of the astronomer, whereas the *Thesmophoriazusae* ends with the *liberation* of the poet. The poet can *defeat* his adversaries, in this case, the women of Athens. The astronomer cannot. And there are other things. And then one thing even that the other crea—he builds up instead the laws, about which the individual citizens cannot be more opposed to philosophy, can do more than the poets . . . But you see, since the dangers of error, today at least, are along the now-traditional lines of being very,<sup>36</sup> well, *Kunst* poetry. Ya? And for this reason, I believe one should at least give a fair chance to show this approach, its virtues and its vices. And that we can say.<sup>37</sup> Better?

**Mr. Schrock:** This comes out. This approach is most fruitful, I suppose, when there's an apparent contradiction in the poet[']s or philosopher's writing. If one finds a contradiction and is unable to resolve it, then does one assume from the general reading of the poet,<sup>38</sup> if you read the poet and find that he commits errors elsewhere,<sup>39</sup> that this contradiction is the result of sloppiness, whereas if you find he's careful in other instances, you could think that the contradiction has a meaning? Is that—

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<sup>viii</sup> There is a brief gap in the tape here.

**LS:** Yes, sure, that would be one way. Yes, sure. But that would apply also to other things. I mean, contradictions are the most shocking irregularities which a writer can commit, but other irregularities are, for example, lack of order—you know, that he jumps from one thing to the other without any visible reason. That may be due to simple lack of craftsmanship or thoughtlessness, but it may of course also be due to other reasons. One has to question.<sup>40</sup> You find sometimes in writers a remark about how they wrote. For example, in Plato you have a remark which is not from Plato. Plato never says a word in the dialogues, as you remember, although you have certain remarks in the Platonic letters in which he speaks in his own name. But here you are confronted today with the difficulty that almost all these letters are now declared to be spurious, especially the second letter, which is a short letter, which is very important. But still,<sup>41</sup> here you can argue on the basis of the present-day assumption that Plato speaks through the mouth, for example, of Socrates. Ya? Socrates says in the *Phaedrus* that speech, and in particular a written speech, is subject to the principle of logographic necessity. Now logographic means speechwriting, so the necessity governing speechwriting. And what is that rule? That just as in a living being there is no part which is not important for the living being fulfilling its function—Plato didn't know of the appendix—in the same way, in a speech everything must be necessary. Now the living being has a function: to live. What is the function of a speech in the highest sense? I think one can say: to make you to think about the important matters. Therefore, now if we assume that Plato acted in agreement with what his own Socrates so emphatically says about speechwriters, we are entitled to believe that in Plato's dialogues every feature, however seemingly trivial, is meaningful, is significant. Now<sup>42</sup> the subtle question is: Where are the limits? Because not everything *can* be meaningful. I mean, chance: in ordinary life there is all kinds of chance, all the time, but in a work of the highest order, there chance is reduced to the minimum. But a minimum of chance remains, and therefore there is the possibility of a misguided subtlety, that you seek something that is a matter of tact, which, as all forms of tact, cannot be transmitted in any rules but depends on experience.

If I may give you the simplest example of rules which are possible, there is one which I have seen so frequently<sup>43</sup> in Plato as well as other writers, and that is that in any enumeration, in *any* enumeration, what is in the center is most important. Now that is clearest if you have an odd number. Then it is clear. If it is an even number, you have to consider the central pair. Now this is never stated by Plato. I came across it about twenty years ago for the first time when I addressed a certain passage in the first book of the *Laws*, where I was completely misguided by the argument because the argument suggested that there were three things. [LS writes on the blackboard] And the argument suggested that number one is the most important thing. But then I saw: no, the whole thing becomes clear when I assume that the second or third one is the most important thing. And then it became clear, and some other observations led me to this rule. Then I found absolutely independently, in writings on common rhetoric, forensic rhetoric, that it was a rule of the rhetoricians, you know, for attorneys, prosecuting attorneys or attorneys, used for defense: you say that you bring into the middle of your defense speech the seamiest side of the man you defend. The reason is very simple. At the beginning, the audience listens, and there of course you speak of all his virtues: you know, that he has been studying at the University of Chicago and got his Ph.D., and was Rockefeller-funded, and so on and so on, and also was running for Congress, and whatever you say. And then the little thing, the embezzlement [laughter], that you mention in the middle while the audience's attention is flagging. And then when you say, as everyone in the room who has ever made a speech knows, "Now I come to my



conclusion”—which of course means there will still be twenty or twenty-five minutes—but then they begin to listen. Ya? And so<sup>44</sup> then in these twenty-five concluding minutes you will again bring the virtues in. Now that is a vital rule of forensic rhetoric, which I’m sure is obeyed instinctively by the good defense lawyers, but which was elaborated as a rule, for example, in Cicero<sup>ix</sup> and other writers. And there was also a rule of tactics, of military tactics: in the front, the brave guys; in the rear, also brave guys; the cowards in the middle. Now you see: weak, cowardly, indefensible things, the dangerous things, the indefensible things in the middle. And it may happen that the most important things theoretically are the least defensible things, are the things least open to vulgar understanding. That’s it.

But<sup>45</sup> I mean the statements about this kind of writing with exceeding care: I have a correction of them which is not too small—it’s somewhere in the file—is not too small, but is of course in no proportion to the extent to which it was practiced. And it disappeared, practically,<sup>46</sup> with society becoming ever more liberal. In proportion to the extent to which a society does not exercise any restraint on opinions, on the expression of opinions, to the extent to which a society permits, without any harm whatever, legal or nonlegal, to the speaker to say anything he believes, the necessity for such writing disappears. You know? I mean,<sup>47</sup> it isn’t quite as simple as I said it, because<sup>48</sup> very rarely do you find a hundred percent liberal society. But still, present societies are ninety percent liberal, there is no question, and in former times societies were ten percent liberal, and therefore there is an enormous difference . . .

But I say there are two things: there is first this possibility, which as a mere possibility, as a mere hypothesis, must be understood. And there is a second thing which is absolutely empirical: Has this possibility of such a kind of writing ever existed in actual fact? And more particularly, has Aristophanes . . . Sure. Now Mr. Cohen, you have a problem. Yes?

**Mr. Cohen:** Do you distinguish between interpretation and hypothesis?

**LS:** Well,<sup>49</sup> if I use this somewhat simplistic distinction, I would say that interpretation belongs to the process of validating or invalidating. The hypothesis would in this particular case be this: there are such writings. Therefore<sup>50</sup> the chances that a writer of the nineteenth or twentieth century would be of this kind are practically zero. I mean, I would not consider this seriously unless it is forced upon me. But I would not—in earlier times, I don’t know, and therefore I’m open-minded. I mean, I’m open-minded (a) that he may be a writer without any such depth, this kind of depth. But I’m open to it. But I must be; that is what my hypothesis compels me to do. I know that this could have been, and I cannot dogmatically exclude it. That’s all.<sup>51</sup> I would say, on the contrary, the simpler, the more childlike, the more innocent you read and take the surface as the whole thing, the more clearly will it appear whether there is a deeper strain which does not meet the eye or not.

**Student:** You began to touch on this when you spoke about the possibility of subtlety, excessive subtlety. How do you go about distinguishing between what is accidental and what—?

**LS:** Yes.<sup>52</sup> Well, for example, maybe let us take a simple thing like names. Ya?<sup>53</sup> In the first book of the *Republic*, there is a fellow who presents a certain point of view who is called

<sup>ix</sup> See e.g., *De Oratore* 2. 313-314.

Thrasymachus. And Thrasymachus means, literally translated, “bold in battle.” Fits him nicely, doesn’t it? There is a guy who presents a similar point of view in the *Gorgias*. His name is Polus. Literally translated, “colt.” Also spirited, not very intellectual people. So there are the names in Plato, and Plato himself plays with them frequently. For example, in the *Apology* the accuser is called Meletus. That was a matter of brute historic fact, but Plato uses it to find meaning in the name, because that reminds, has something to do with the Greek root for caring—*melai*, *epimeleisthai* and such words, as if he were called “Mr. Carer.” And Mr. Carer has accused Socrates because he cares so much for Athens. Ya? So there are many . . . things.

Does this mean that Plato—the name Callicles,<sup>54</sup> who is the only character who’s not historically identified in any way. Yes? There are some hypotheses, but one really cannot . . . The name is absolutely meaningless. Plato has chosen that name. But whether I should go into the question of names and say I must really find some strain of meaning in every name which occurs, I don’t see that. I mean,<sup>55</sup> for example, we have the *Protagoras*.<sup>56</sup> If you translate the name literally, it means something like “the first to speak,” “the first to speak up.” Now it so happens that Protagoras, in his speech, says of himself, “I am the first who speaks up.”<sup>x</sup> Funny. But if you look at the *Gorgias*, I don’t think you will find anything of this kind,<sup>57</sup> although there is occasionally a connection between *Gorgias* and the gorgon. You may have seen examples, yes? I mean, if I observed something a while ago, I would of course take notice of it, but I would not dig and overlook the wood for the trees. That is what I mean.<sup>58</sup> In all matters of this nature, there is something like tact, by the sense of the reasonable and plausible, which comes from experience and which cannot be transmitted by rules. There are certain rules<sup>59</sup> which one can formulate and which are helpful, but they are never sufficient.

Well, one could<sup>60</sup> [take] another example from Plato. There are Platonic dialogues where the first word—of course not the of the translation, but of the Greek original—is manifestly meaningful. The first word of the *Republic*, literally translated, would be “Down I went.”<sup>61xi</sup> Now later on, going down in opposition to going up plays a key role in describing the relation of the philosopher and the city. Ya? Going up out of the cave and going down. Meaningful. The first word[s] of the *Gorgias* are<sup>62</sup> “of battle and fight, of war and battle.”<sup>”xii</sup> War and battle. Yes.<sup>63</sup> It gives you already something of the spirit of this dialogue. There are other dialogues in which nothing of this kind is visible. Why should I stop at the first word, and then who knows? Plato did it where it was convenient and did not do it where not. That was the way in which I started to read the *Banquet* first, which begins with very—how shall I say?—pay words. What is it exactly? I’ve forgot it at the moment.

**Student:** δοκῶ.

**LS:** Yes, “I seem.” I seem. But then later on,<sup>64</sup> exactly by not worrying about it, I came across something which made this beginning intelligible. There was one speech. Is it not—

**Student:** The speech of Zeus in Aristophanes’s speech?

<sup>x</sup> Perhaps Strauss refers to *Protagoras* 317a-c, where Protagoras proudly proclaims himself as a sophist, explicitly breaking with other sophists who prefer to conceal the nature of their profession.

<sup>xi</sup> *Katabēn*.

<sup>xii</sup> *Polemou kai machēs*.

**LS:** Oh, the speech of Zeus, yes, which was the beginning in that way. No other speech of Zeus in Plato anywhere begins that way.<sup>xiii</sup> That is what I mean. I mean, it is really a rule of thumb and not more. And the main point is, as I always say: Be good. I mean, “Don’t sin.” Ya? Be good. Read carefully and think carefully, that is all. But on the other hand, one must beware of a certain kind of levity which means: if one doesn’t see any meaning at one’s reading, that there may not be more meaning than has met the eye.<sup>66</sup>

I have not spoken of an entirely different kind of complication, namely, that there are writers of extreme care who have something entirely different in mind than the old writers, and where it is, I believe, impossible to discover this kind of meaning except if they’ve accidentally spoken about it. Now I will mention it, lest I whet an appetite and do not satisfy it.<sup>67</sup> I have only one example ready at hand. In Goethe’s *Faust*, there is a famous scene, the witches’ supper.<sup>xiv</sup> Ya? The witches’ supper.<sup>68</sup> I mean, it plays a certain role there in the context of the plot, and so that was what I understood. Then I read in a letter which Goethe wrote, and which I found by sheer accident, that<sup>69</sup> he says that is a description of a decaying society shortly before revolution. I do not quote literally. I must confess this idea would never have occurred to me. And why? Now what Goethe did was this: Goethe tried to convey<sup>70</sup> the impression on the senses of two such entirely different things as the witches’ supper on the one hand, and a very sophisticated decaying society, like the French nobility prior to the Revolution [on the other]. In other words, you see, the common thing was an aesthetic impression, strictly speaking, meaning for the senses; whereas in this kind of literature I have in mind it is *never* merely the sensual expression but there are some clear indications in speech. So one would have had to call the one logical, derived from speech, and the other aesthetic. That exists. And I believe, therefore, what the better critics today consider exclusively is this kind of sensual aesthetic element, you know, which indeed does not convey a clear meaning.

But<sup>71</sup> to mention only one example among thousands which occur to me, when you take an author like Thucydides, everyone who has read Thucydides even in a translation knows that this is a deep thinker. [His work is] very dense and thought out. But what people overlook and<sup>72</sup> [what] I think obstructs the deeper understanding of Thucydides is a certain kind of playfulness which Thucydides has. One example: the first two speeches which occur in the first book.<sup>73</sup> The first begins with the word “just,” *dikaion*;<sup>xv</sup> the second begins with the word “necessary.”<sup>xvi</sup> Well, of course one must think a bit, and then on the basis of Thucydides<sup>74</sup> one will know that these are two very different, possibly conflicting, considerations: justice and necessity. Now the beauty, as far as I understand it, is this: that the appeal to justice, by beginning with the word for just, is made by the less just people; and the appeal to necessity—or if you call it, if you please, expediency—is made by the people who were less unjust. That is not implausible. We all have seen people who talk more about justice precisely because they care less about it, and vice versa. This is<sup>75</sup> only one of many examples.

<sup>xiii</sup> The speech begins ‘δοκῶ μοι.’

<sup>xiv</sup> *Faust*, part 1, ll. 2337ff.

<sup>xv</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.32.1 (speech of the Corcyraeans).

<sup>xvi</sup> *Anagkaion*. Thucydides, *History* 1.37.1 (speech of the Corinthians).

But the general discussion is not very helpful, except to make clear in the most general terms what in itself is a mere possibility.<sup>76</sup> But the proof of their quality cannot be given by a discussion of the possibility. What can be created by a discussion is a certain plausibility; namely, if we reflect on the fact that our present-day notions of books and reading and writing are naturally derivative from a liberal society, and the further observation that up to a certain point—say, surely not prior to 1640—there never was a liberal society. Athens was of course not liberal. There was no freedom of opinion, as the trial of Socrates shows. I mean, regardless of whether Socrates was condemned justly or unjustly, he was condemned on the basis of opinion. The law was clear: if Socrates had held certain opinions, this alone made him guilty of capital punishment.<sup>77</sup> That, I think, is a simple difference between a liberal and a nonliberal society: whether opinions as opinions are regarded as crimes or not. And I think the first example would be the English Civil War under Cromwell, with qualifications even there. And of course after the Restoration, and at more or less the same time, the same development in the Low Countries. These are the first examples . . .<sup>78</sup> The practice could be very liberal, and it was so in certain cases, like Athens, in certain times of imperial Rome, in certain epochs, but there was never a legal basis for that. And don't underestimate it; I mean, that is one of these follies of the sociological approach, that they underestimate the importance of law. An honest man will always consider also what the law says, even if the law is not very strictly enforced. And we have to consider this simple fact, along which is the so-called sociology of knowledge, namely, that liberal societies strictly understood are a very recent phenomenon. Much too . . . Liberalism in the sense in which I have used it now—liberalism has *n* meanings, as you all know—is of course not identical with democracy, and often democracy is not necessarily liberal, and a monarchy, for example, is not necessarily illiberal. In quite a few respects, the French Republic, the Third Republic, was more liberal than the Anglo-Saxon countries; and at the same time the Germany<sup>79</sup> after Bismarck was amazingly liberal—in no way democratic, but amazingly liberal. They are long questions. Good.

But is there any point you would like to take up before we turn to the *Wasps*?<sup>xvii</sup>—which<sup>80</sup> hardly anyone can claim regarding any book in order to be sure that this is a man who writes with excessive care. If you have a sufficient number of examples of that, you are bound to have the prejudice that we do it all the time. It still would need an examination, surely. But I can only say that the danger today is not that of unnecessary subtlety, but that of indefensible unsubtlety. Yes?

**Mr. Gildin:** Yes, I mean, this wasn't really a philosophy question. There is a problem regarding Shakespeare, when one sometimes finds something to be of a great magnitude, and at other times there seems to be strong evidence of either carelessness or indifference about the published text of the work.

**LS:** Yes, that is of course a terrible situation. If you don't have a good text, to that extent you can't be certain that you have Shakespeare. That's a great difficulty. In the case of the Plato, we are in a wonderful position because the text is really very good. Very good. I mean, there are certain dark passages, possibly corrupt, but on the whole it's very good. In Aristophanes, there's a great difficulty on this ground alone. I never mentioned that. The ascription of the individual speeches to different characters is largely hypothetical.<sup>81</sup> I take for granted that the common

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<sup>xvii</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

ascription is sound, because otherwise we would come into a difficult question. It makes an impression in many cases where it was important to me; I considered that, and I think on the whole it is correct. But that is not clear in the manuscripts. That is a great problem, surely. That can exist anywhere. Yes?

**Student:** Am I right in thinking that your opinion as to why the reasons for this excessive subtlety stems only from the legal prohibitions against holding certain opinions, or were you—?

**LS:** Well, that is the most practical and the most—what shall I say?—unsubtle reason for it, yes? Well, I wrote once some essays with the title *Persecution and the Art and Writing*.<sup>xviii</sup> I indicated that, clearly. But you see,<sup>82</sup> if you go a little bit deeper, it turns around as follows: let us assume that a writer knows certain opinions cannot be questioned without committing a crime. Ya? It doesn't have to be a legal crime. It doesn't have to be a capital crime. But social ostracism, to be regarded as a dirty fellow, is not something which a proud man would like to have. Ya? I mean, in other words, if there are forbidden opinions or however you call it, that [is something that] comes up for all men, for all thinking men who do not agree, who think that these forbidden opinions are wrong as stated. Good.

Now if<sup>83</sup> there are [such forbidden opinions], here is the crossing of the roads. A man may say: Well, I'm going to prepare a society in which no opinions will be forbidden, a liberal society. Then this [kind of writing] would be a kind of temporary concession to the prejudices of a benighted illiberal society. A simple example of that would be Thomas Hobbes, who practiced a certain amount of concealment, but quite clearly with the prospect [that] a hundred years from now this "kingdom of darkness,"<sup>xix</sup> as he called it, will have been dissolved. Yes? The alternative, which is more interesting, is this, that the man says: You will never have liberal societies. If you destroy these particular opinions—say, about Zeus, adorations to Hera and Cronos and so—you will get another set of opinions which may be a bit better, [but] which may also be considerably worse, for all you know. So there will always be opinions which are not quite reasonable. Now such a man, of course—in such a case it becomes a matter of *responsibility* and not of mere fear to be careful. Yes? . . . Is this clear?

**Student:** . . .

**LS:** Ya, ya, sure. Both exist. I mean, the most simple of course is the case of what they called in tsarist Russia Aesopic language. I mean, taken from the fables of Aesop, yes? How do you pronounce it? Aesop? Ya? In other words, you tell stories about some nice little animals, rats and squirrels, but you really mean the prime minister [laughter] and so on. Ya? Good. That's simple. And they also call it—as I've seen from a communist writer, very funny—when they speak of older times, they call it "the language of slaves." Ya?<sup>84</sup> By the way, to read such a book as Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* is not uninteresting from this point of view, although it is extremely simple. You know his complete silence about the Stalin era, which has this simple explanation, that it is too terrible to say, it is beyond speech, has of course also the implication that he couldn't dare to write about it. Yes? Good. That's simple. In other words, man merely bows to

<sup>xviii</sup> *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press 1952).

<sup>xix</sup> From the title of part 4 of Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

the banner<sup>xx</sup> and nothing else, but the much more interesting place is where the banners are rather remote and a broader view is behind it. Ya? I mean, it's more exciting, at any rate. Good. For example, the question of Shakespeare is an infinite question; that is only the smallest part of it.<sup>85</sup>

**Mr. Gildin:** I meant that the scholars often quote his indifference, because other poets produced very excellent texts of their poems in that century.

**LS:** I don't know. I mean, since one knows so very little about Shakespeare's external life and all kinds of things might be possible, therefore I don't believe that Shakespeare was careless regarding any verse he wrote, from the little bit of<sup>86</sup> what I understood. But he might have been compelled by things beyond his control; he might have been unable to take care about the printing. I don't know why. Good.

Well,<sup>87</sup> for a coherent discussion of the *Wasps*, we do not have the time. And I will perhaps make a few general remarks which we will take up next time when we meet again. Now, as I said at the beginning, fairly and politely taking issue, in this play,<sup>88</sup> the point which you stated very well: that Philocleon, the father of Bdelycleon, the lover of condemnation—I mean, he is not only a lover of law courts, he loves to condemn. And in the scene with that dog, what the son achieves by trickery, as you rightly called it, is an acquittal. He likes to condemn. So what is this kind of man? That is the great question.<sup>89</sup> And that this is not an unnecessary question or an improper question is indicated by the fact that it is answered in the play more than once. Why does he love to condemn? I mean, that is first a character trait. He is an ill-tempered man. Ya? *Dyskolos*, ill-temper[ed].<sup>xxi</sup> Sure, an old ill-tempered fellow. And the term is also applied sometimes to other dicasts; but that is not his special madness. Do you remember what? I mean, what is the special reason,<sup>90</sup> the reason peculiar to Philocleon, why he loves to condemn?

**Student:** The Delphic oracle.

**LS:** The Delphic oracle. So strictly speaking, he does not love to condemn; he feels morally obliged to condemn because of the Delphian oracle. Is it not interesting that Socrates too traces his mission, an entirely different mission, to the Delphic oracle? You see<sup>91</sup> for what difficult purposes that the oracle could be used. So the Delphic oracle, and that means ultimately the gods. The gods have such an influence. That is one very important consideration.

Now the other point is this, which is connected. We have in a way answered the question: What is the difference between the other jurymen and the hero jurymen? The other fellows are simple fellows. They don't have such kind of religious obligations. They don't feel that obligation to condemn. Now there is another difference, which is equally important although much more external, between the hero jurymen and the mass of the jurymen.<sup>92</sup> I grant that there are passages which obscure it, but the plot as a whole brings it out with perfect clarity. What is the motivation of the poor fellows, these old guys who go to the jury, to the court and do their duty?

**Mr. Metzel:** Money?

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<sup>xx</sup> Presumably, that is, the one who bans either forms or the content of speech.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Dyskolos* is also the title of the only extant play of Menander, and of the New Comedy.

**LS:** Money. And why do they do that, may I ask? Why are they so interested in money?

**Mr. Metzel:** To eat?

**LS:** They are poor. Poor. And there is a long scene between a father jurymen and his boy, which brings it out that whether they have tonight, I don't say a steak, but a hamburger . . . depends on whether there was a sitting of the jury. What about the hero?

**Mr. Metzel:** He has an affluent son, at least.

**LS:** Surely. In other words,<sup>93</sup> on the contrary, he has an obviously wealthy son. There are many slaves around—two come up visibly, but there are others. They are wealthy people, and the son says to his father: Don't go to the law courts anymore, you can feast at home every day. That is elaborated with considerable obscenity, what kind of pleasures he can get for nothing if he doesn't go. And so they are wealthy. So that only underlines the fact that the motivation of the hero is entirely different from that of the poor people, and the poor people are the ones who are easily convinced, who are from a certain moment on, after the son has made his speech, fully on the side of the son. You know? They are nice people.<sup>94</sup> You can't blame them. You can't blame them. They are [poor], they need that money. I mean, that is<sup>95</sup> as if you would [say that] Aristophanes does not suggest the abolition of Social Security or the progressive income tax, if I may suggest present-day equivalents. No, no. In this sense, the play is not political at all. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** How much of this opinion of the dicasts is because they perhaps held a special place in the *polis*? They weren't ordinary citizens; they were special citizens getting their military pension, in fact.

**LS:** Yes, that is indeed an improvement which this suggests, that only former GIs should<sup>96</sup> become jurymen. Do you remember?

**Mr. Metzel:** That is the point that Weber makes at one point.

**LS:** Which Weber?

**Mr. Metzel:** Max Weber.

**LS:** What [point] does he make?

**Mr. Metzel:** <sup>97</sup>That the dicast system was a system to split up the spoils, the loot, the booty, the land grants and etc. that Athens collected overseas, and the war accounts.

**LS:** <sup>98</sup>However important it may be, Aristophanes does not criticize them. On the contrary, he makes even the very demagogic suggestion that much more of that booty should be divided up amongst the citizen body.<sup>99</sup>

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, they reacted immediately and were immediately won by this argument.

**LS:** Ya, ya, sure. That is a political trait. But<sup>100</sup> Bdelycleon has no influence, of course,<sup>101</sup> [on] what will be done with the booty . . . the Athenian empire, but he has influence only on his father, and so the action is this: first, that Bdelycleon has to bring the citizen body or the cream of the citizen body on his side. Ya? And that he does by showing them: You get only these few bucks, and the real stuff goes to the demagogues. Ya? That's a simple demagogic trick on his side. But after the father has been convinced no longer to go to the law court, then that's the second half of the play, that is as important as what happened up to this point. Now in other words, what he has to find—after having persuaded his father that he may no longer go to the law courts, he has to find substitutes for that. Ya? You know, William James had what he called “substitutes for war.”<sup>102xxii</sup> [Bdelycleon] had to find a substitute for condemning. Now<sup>103</sup> there are three substitutes altogether, I believe, three scenes which one has to consider. The first, about which you reported very clearly, is the mock law court at home, on the dogs. Yes? That is sure, but obviously that is not sufficient, although he has infinite conveniences at home (again, I cannot say what these conveniences are, because they are not quite decent), but all kinds of things which he can do while sitting in judgment on the dogs which he could not do when sitting in judgment on citizens in the public law courts. But your imagination may very well supply the details. That is one. But that is not sufficient, because then the whole problem would be settled. Two more substitutes come up. What's the second substitute?

**Mr. Metzel:** Eating.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Metzel:** Eating.

**LS:** Ya, feasting. But more important: in polite society. And that is important, because here you raise the question: Is Bdelycleon (that's the son) not also in a way blamable, not to say a fool? And that seems to be the case. He tries to make a nice gentleman out of his father, and that ends in complete failure.<sup>104</sup> And he does certain things which I think we all would find exaggerated:<sup>105</sup> he buys for him the most elegant cashmere coats, and in this case it was some silk and stuff from Persia. Ya? But the main point: How do you converse in nice society? And the father has of course the crudest notions, and the son tells him: No, you can't; you have to be present at this—now what would it be: at this race; horse races, for example, or other—I don't know about [whether] boxing matches would belong to a proper theme of [polite society]. No, but for example, Olympia. Ya, sure, and what is going on in the Rose Bowl in California<sup>xxiii</sup> would, I'm sure, belong to polite society conversation today. And then also stories of poets, you know, this kind of thing. So. But the father is a complete flop, and he behaves like a rude rustic and gets completely drunk and drags out a flute-girl—and mayhem, you know, and assault and battery. And as you rightly say, this condemner becomes now the object of criminal charges against him. In this part there is a clear failure of Bdelycleon. A clear failure. You must not forget, it might still be better that this man is fined than that he condemns other people to death. But to some extent, it is a failure. To transform this fellow into a nice gentleman is hopeless.

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<sup>xxii</sup> William James, “The Moral Equivalent of War” (1906).

<sup>xxiii</sup> An outdoor stadium in Pasadena.



But that is not the end. Not the end. There are three such substitutes. What's the third one? This dancing scene. The dancing scene. I must say that I did not know that this was so until my present reading, because I had the general impression it ends with a failure, but that's not true. The third is a success, as is shown by the fact that everyone—for example, the dicasts, the jurymen, the courts, who speak for the poet—are pleased with him. It is not an end like the *Clouds*, you know, where it is a clear defeat for the hero: Socrates, of course; the other one was Strepsiades. But here it is not so. At the end we have reconciliation. What is a dance?<sup>xxiv</sup> One would have to understand the dances. Philocleon's bad temper, which leads to a breakdown when he seeks a substitute in polite society, leads to success if one uses the third substitute. Forgive my bad grammar and all that; you get my point. What is that? What is that dance? What's it about, I mean in the most general terms? It is obviously a parody. A parody. The names are mentioned of the people whom he parodies. What has parody to do with the temper of Philocleon? What is his temper? And what is parody? What is his temper, Miss Hill? You know it.

**Miss Hill:** He is bad-tempered.

**LS:** Ya, bad-tempered and malicious. Is there a connection between parody and malice? I would say that a man of perfect sweet temper would never write a parody. Now let us look at what the poet does. One great part of the comedies are parodies, especially of tragedy but also of other things; for example, the dances. Here is a use, there is a mitigated use of malice, which is universally pleasing and is a counter-poison to this viciousness which is most hateful in the case of viciousness of citizen against fellow citizen—although, as you rightly say, it finds good use in war. You know, when they use their states against foreign enemies, that was okay, but you can't have war all the time. There must be some outlet for that enmity. One form which is not negligible is comedy, which gives an . . . The malicious wit of comedy is effective as a substitute or cure for waspishness misplaced; therefore I think it is really a vindication of the poet himself. You remember, there are quite a few allusions to what happened to him with the previous comedy, probably the *Clouds*, you know, and this kind of thing. And there is also a passage<sup>106</sup> (we may read that next time) in which it appears that Bdelycleon, the son who binds his father, is the comic poet, but a comic poet who knows [that he cannot heal this ancient disease]. Aristophanes is distinguished from that inference as a comic poet who has learned that the polite jokes, the subtle jokes, cannot fulfill this practical function of counteracting the waspishness.<sup>107</sup> I will try to develop this more fully next time. But that I think it is—really the ending is a happy ending here. One must emphasize—especially for me, that is, I had not considered that before. Bdelycleon surely makes a mistake, but Bdelycleon has too-high expectations from such a waspish man. But what Bdelycleon does not do, Aristophanes does. He shows a way out which is helpful.

**Miss Hill:** But that was not what you said earlier, about the most important part being in the middle.

**LS:** Ya, ya. Well, this was also—but never do that mechanically. The labor is very great if one does it mechanically. But, for example, last time, in the *Birds*, the three immigrants: the center one was a poet; and if you count properly, among those who came to the founding scene, I

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<sup>xxiv</sup> There is a brief gap in the tape here.

believe you will also find that the astronomer was in the middle, although that is not immediately visible. Yes . . . that is so. But I would say this:<sup>108</sup> the question is not so much to see that something is in the middle. Yes? That is a matter of simple counting. But—

**Miss Hill:** No, but I mean now, as opposed to the beginning and the very end.

**LS:** Yes, yes. But the point is, *why* is it in the middle? You see, it is the most important, but from what point of view most important: simply, or is it most important only in this particular context? That is the question which must be settled afterward, must be decided.

Well, so we leave it at this today. And next time, Miss Hill, we will hear your paper. And then Mr. Strickland.

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<sup>1</sup> Moved “only.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “So there is no—.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “I—you say—.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “begin—.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “Now—.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “in meter and rhyme—.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “as to be—.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “what we are going—.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “—there may be a disproportion—.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “And this—.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “Well—.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “we have—.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “its—.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “of play.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “—that is.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “now.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “the god of love—.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “not—that is.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “look at the—.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “It is—.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “I mean, such a work,.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “whether he.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “That is,.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “is this—.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “Can—.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “if—.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “To—and.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “that he is—.”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “that is a very—.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “That—.”

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “of—.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “You,.”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted “I take—.”

<sup>35</sup> Deleted “something which—.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “—I mean.”

<sup>37</sup> Deleted “Is it—.”

<sup>38</sup> Deleted “that either he was—if you assume—.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “you should then assume.”

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “There are sometimes—.”

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- 41 Deleted "taking—but."  
 42 Deleted "there is of course—."  
 43 Deleted "as very—."  
 44 Deleted "you will also bring."  
 45 Deleted "very—."  
 46 Deleted "with the emergence—."  
 47 Deleted "there is a bit—."  
 48 Deleted "there are still—there are—."  
 49 Deleted "inevitably—."  
 50 Deleted "whenever you study and—."  
 51 Deleted "That depends then on the—."  
 52 Deleted "that is—."  
 53 Deleted "That Plato—."  
 54 Deleted "whose character stays—."  
 55 Deleted "if—."  
 56 Deleted "and 'Protagoras,' if you translate it—in the dialogue, *Protagoras*."  
 57 Deleted "regarding the *Gorgias*. Why should there then warrant—."  
 58 Deleted "These things, in all matters—."  
 59 Deleted "with."  
 60 Deleted "—for example. let us—."  
 61 Deleted "'Down I went.'"  
 62 Deleted "—the first word is."  
 63 Deleted "For—."  
 64 Deleted "by not—."  
 65 Deleted "That is something—."  
 66 Deleted "There are—."  
 67 Deleted "For example, I mean,."  
 68 Deleted "I've never—."  
 69 Deleted "it."  
 70 Deleted "the sensible expression, the expression—."  
 71 Deleted "I—."  
 72 Deleted "which."  
 73 Deleted "The one begins—."  
 74 Deleted "and then."  
 75 Deleted "kind of—."  
 76 Deleted "And—."  
 77 Deleted "That is, I mean—."  
 78 Deleted "The need—the law—what."  
 79 Deleted "of—."  
 80 Deleted "is—."  
 81 Deleted "That—I mean, we cannot—."  
 82 Deleted "the thing to—."  
 83 Deleted "these—."  
 84 Deleted "But what they do now that—."  
 85 Deleted "I mean, the fact that—yes."  
 86 Deleted "his—."  
 87 Deleted "we have—."  
 88 Deleted "that the question which—."  
 89 Deleted "Now what does he—."  
 90 Deleted "which—."  
 91 Deleted "how—."  
 92 Deleted "That is—."  
 93 Deleted "he does—."  
 94 Deleted "They are only—."  
 95 Deleted "so."  
 96 Deleted "get—."

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<sup>97</sup> Deleted “About—.”

<sup>98</sup> Deleted “Aristophanes—.”

<sup>99</sup> Deleted “, as you have—the citizen body.”

<sup>100</sup> Deleted “there is not—the action—.”

<sup>101</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>102</sup> Deleted “He.”

<sup>103</sup> Deleted “what—.”

<sup>104</sup> Deleted “I mean,.”

<sup>105</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>106</sup> Deleted “in which—.”

<sup>107</sup> Deleted “I think that is—.”

<sup>108</sup> Deleted “you—.”

## Session 8: no date

**Leo Strauss:** And I believe the key remark which you made is this: that the problem of justice as it appears in the *Clouds* is that Socrates is not strictly speaking unjust but is impious.<sup>i</sup> And therefore the question is: What is the relation between justice and piety? Now it is shown that Socrates is not defeated because of his impiety. Strepsiades is not really shocked by Socrates's impiety for one moment, as we have seen, but he becomes shocked only when he sees what this means to the family: that beating the mother, beating the parents, incest, becomes permitted on the basis of Socrates. In other words, this is the key phenomenon, and<sup>1</sup> you interpret this to mean that the family is conventional and acquires its status, its sacredness, only by virtue of these humanly-invented gods. Yes, I think there is much to be said for that. You want to bring us up to date. Yes?

**Student:** Maybe to this point.

**LS:** Yes. Else, would you like to bring up another point?

**Same Student:** <sup>2</sup>I think this is a crucial point.

**LS:** Yes, sure, it is a crucial point, but you really don't . . . Now<sup>3</sup> I mean, if we want to have this class to have any termination—and we are obliged to terminate it at some time, obliged by law—we must begin next time with our study of Plato, and therefore we must discuss the *Wasps* today, which we have not really discussed. But one thing I would like to do. Can you state now, Mr. Haight, succinctly and clearly, what your criticism is of what Miss . . . just said?

**Mr. Haight:** That the scenes in the plays which supposedly support this interpretation may also be explained, as time and again concluded, for other reasons. And therefore I don't want to say that this interpretation is wrong, but that if there are other reasons for the inclusions of these and evidence for this interpretation, it cannot be said definitely and clearly that this must have been what Aristophanes intended.

**LS:** That is an excellent argument, but at the same time an iffy argument, because you would have to say, show what these alternatives are which account for the phenomenon.

**Mr. Haight:** This is true. You have to have very succinct statements, and certainly I don't want to involve the class in any long discussion of my reasons, but my reasons—

**LS:** Yes. No, this I have in there. All right, all right. I will read it. It's a pity last time that I really cleared the desk, or the deck, entirely for you, but maybe<sup>4</sup> you can bring up some of these points later when we turn in connection with the *Wasps*. Did you want to add another point?

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<sup>i</sup> Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

**Student:**<sup>ii</sup> Well, I think another point that I wanted to make was that just as a choice only between the Just and Unjust Speech, he doesn't seem to suggest that there can be any alternative to this sort of animal-like existence<sup>5</sup> of the Unjust Speech and conventionality. Does he see no basis anywhere else?

**LS:** That is a very serious and interesting question, and<sup>6</sup> if we go on from what you said now, it would mean that Aristophanes's overall suggestion—I mean, if we generalize from the *Clouds*—is a reduction of human life to the life of the brutes. I say “brutes” because the Greek word *zoon*, which means animal, includes man. Yes, I mean<sup>7</sup> animal is the genus, which can be split into two parts: animals which possess speech, that are men; and animals which do not possess speech,<sup>8</sup> [which] are the dumb animals, as we say. Yes? And therefore, in other words, Aristophanes suggests a kind of return to brutishness. This interpretation<sup>9</sup> is not quite tenable, because a man of the intelligence of Aristophanes and of a certain pride of his own craft cannot have meant this so literally, but there is this element in it. And that is exactly the suggestion which Plato makes<sup>10</sup> in the *Banquet*. What Plato suggests in the *Banquet* is this: he knows of course that Aristophanes believed in wisdom and that the brutes cannot be wise, but he cannot give an *account* of wisdom, and therefore it serves him right if one leaves it at that. And that is what Plato presents. For Aristophanes<sup>11</sup> as presented by Plato, Eros is strictly horizontal, on the same level. Ya? Not vertical. But the Platonic notion of Eros is that it is a striving for the highest transcending level. Aristophanes understands it, crudely, horizontally.

Another way of putting it is that in the *Assembly of Women* Aristophanes introduces communism and equality of the sexes. As a matter of fact, there is a preponderance of the female sex, roughly as Plato suggests in the *Republic*. But one thing is missing which is so crucial in Plato and is completely absent from Aristophanes,<sup>12</sup> is so crucial in Plato's *Republic* and completely absent from the *Assembly of Women*, the third big institution: the rule of philosophers. And that of course is related, whether Eros is understood horizontally or<sup>13</sup> vertically.<sup>14</sup> [Horizontally] means denial of *nous*, of mind, and therefore it's a denial of the rule of philosophers. And on this basis Plato has built his comical presentation of Aristophanes in the *Banquet*, where the whole effort of Eros is a return to the pre-mind state: simple union of the two separated parts, say, males and females, and complete immersion into that. And that of course means there is no longer anything, any object of the mind, where—*vis-à-vis*, here's this thinking being, and there the object of the thinking being is involved. That is what Plato—that is the . . . I mean, surely. But Plato's objection goes of course much deeper, as he indicates in the *Banquet* by having Aristophanes change his place with the physician Eryximachus, who is a direct pupil of the famous pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles. The pre-Socratic philosophy—that is what Plato suggests—does not understand mind in its specific . . . and therefore it must reduce mind, in one way or the other, to non-mind. And therefore, in application to human things, it must reduce men to brutes, which of course is not limited to pre-Socratic philosophy but comes up again in modern materialistic and positivistic thought, where the same occurs again, technically perhaps more perfect but I believe also less clear. That is surely the point. But, as I say, that is not an interpretation of Aristophanes, it is really a criticism of Aristophanes, because Aristophanes<sup>15</sup> surely meant that there is something like wisdom—and which is peculiar to men and not to the brutes, and this is a distinction, an honor of man to have. Even the *polis* is, after all, a human thing and not a brutish thing. Yes?

<sup>ii</sup> The student who read the paper.

**Same Student:** How did he indicate this concern for wisdom?

**LS:** Well, read the *parabasis*,<sup>16</sup> what he says in this place of himself. But from this point of view the fact that the Birds, for example, play such a role, you know,<sup>17</sup> could be used with a certain malice by Plato as a proof of his interpretation, of his caricature of Aristophanes. He knew it could be used in this way. And I mean, the mere fact that at the end of the *Banquet* the only beings who are awake and can talk, the only three thinking beings are Socrates, and Agathon, and Aristophanes, although he dozed off a little bit earlier than Agathon. This much. Now what other point did you want to make?

**Same Student:** Exactly what standard is he judging the old Athenian polity by?

**LS:** Well, this question must be answerable on the basis of what we have read. Why does he prefer the old polity to the present extreme democracy? Is there anyone among you who has an answer? It's not a difficult question. Well, all the *excesses* which he presents, ya? For example, this jury system, and this preponderance of the rabble of Athens, of the city of Athens as compared with the healthy rural population.<sup>18</sup> I mean, what was common to the conservatives, if we may use that term—I mean those opposed to Pericles, and naturally still more to Cleon<sup>19</sup>—[is] the point of view which you'll find in Plato, in Aristotle, in Thucydides, and everywhere. The same people who were afraid of the madness—that was the term which they used—of the democracy where everyone had in principle the same say; I mean the simple story that the lot can make anyone a juryman and even can give him one of the highest positions. You know there were certain restrictions only on generalship and on the treasury,<sup>20</sup> because these seem to be imprudent, to make a man a general who was a notorious coward or had no other distinction, or to make a man a treasurer who was a notorious embezzler. But otherwise the restrictions were very small. You had to prove that you had paid your taxes or the equivalent of taxes, that you had done your military service if you were called upon to do it, and whether—an interesting other point<sup>21</sup>—you took proper care of the graves of your parents. That was also a point which was used in the *dokimathia*, as they called it, a kind of appraisal preceding election or vote. The others who fulfilled these minimal conditions, their names were in the urn and could be selected.

The good old times—I mean, the point is this, whether these times were so good is a long question. And there is also a question whether each of these men who speaks about them was utterly convinced of that. The general idea was a brake; you know, to apply a brake. And in practical terms it means: Is there not a body of laws—that was not so clearly defined as it might be today—a body of laws which cannot be overridden by *psēphisma*, by a mere vote, you know, on a measure of the day? For example, take the case of Socrates, the only political action of Socrates, the question of the generals or the admirals at the battle of Arginusae.<sup>iii</sup> They had not picked up the corpses. It was not a matter of the living sailors but of the corpses: it was a religious crime, because they had to be brought home to Attica for proper burial; that had something to do with the ancestor worship and this kind of thing. There was a trial, and in the trial certain legal safeguards—namely, that the decision must not be made on the same day, and I forgot the other points; there was a law—were simply disregarded. And Socrates protested, and of course without success. Now in other words, while in a way the assembly was sovereign,<sup>22</sup> it

<sup>iii</sup> Plato's *Apology of Socrates* 32b.

was still understood [that] there are certain laws which one cannot change. They don't have this simple distinction which we have between the constitution and ordinary law, but something like it is this.

Now the old-fashioned people were very anxious to limit the legislative power of the assembly and,<sup>23</sup> in other words, to insist on the fundamental distinction between a vote on common measures which had to remain within the limits of the law and simple change—you know what I mean, outright changes of the law. That was a practical, very important point, but it went also together with other issues: for example, imperialism and exploitation by the leading city (namely, Athens) of her allies;<sup>24</sup> or an anti-imperialistic policy and therefore one which<sup>25</sup> would have avoided the Peloponnesian War and would have regarded the cooperation of Athens and Sparta against a foreign enemy as the most important consideration.<sup>26</sup> So there was extreme democracy at home, which went together with an imperialistic policy. You see, that is of course very different from what the line-up generally in modern times is. The extreme democracy was an extremely imperialistic policy, an irrational policy—that was the view of these men. I mean, Thucydides, who is particularly fair and restrained in his judgment, and who admits that Pericles himself, if he had lived long enough, would have saved the situation. You know? But of course Pericles was dead at that time,<sup>27</sup> and the successors to Pericles abandoned the moderate policy of Pericles. But the objection to Pericles was this: that Pericles,<sup>28</sup> by bringing in the extreme democracy, made moderation entirely dependent on the accident that the key man happened to be a moderate man. The institutional brakes he had abandoned. Therefore the opposition to Pericles.

You know,<sup>29</sup> you have contemporary parallels; for example, the issue which was raised by the Supreme Court packing two decades ago.<sup>iv</sup> And anything altering the brakes on the will of the majority of the moment, that was the practical issue; and there, I think, everyone, every sensible man was on the same side. And there can perhaps be made a case for Pericles in a given situation, but that is a difficult thing. The *prima facie* case was with these people. I mean, we must not follow present-day inclinations and all kinds of wrong analogies to think that this was mere prejudice. I think one can say that all the great writers whom we have—the word democracy<sup>30</sup> can mean all kinds of things, the word is not decisive, but their general notion of what is *sensible* and not, the older notion, does not differ so that the practical proposals of a man like Thucydides, or men like Plato and Aristotle and Aristophanes, would not have differed to any degree. The difference is not there: the difference is in the *principles* to which they appeal. And there was a crude political term, that was “the ancestral polity,” something which existed or was thought to have existed; that politically made no great difference prior to the emergence of the extreme democracy, and then they were all united. That, I think, does not create a great difficulty. I mean, of course one has to assemble the material and go to a biographic point, but I think the result is fairly obvious where we begin. And of course there was a connection between this constitutional change and certain innovations in manners; I mean, say, the old-fashioned respect for older people, respect for parents, respect for tradition, declined, naturally.

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<sup>iv</sup> After his reelection in 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed legislation (the Judicial Procedures Reform Bill of 1937) to increase the number of justices on the Supreme Court, with a view to protecting New Deal legislation from adverse legal rulings.



Then there was a connection between this loosening of the old morality and theories, what is vulgarly called the sophist. But here a difficulty arises because<sup>31</sup> not all so-called sophists were simply unscrupulous men. And secondly, that contained also a possible remedy<sup>32</sup> for the . . . And that is therefore the ambiguity of people like Aristophanes, and also like Plato. Plato also knew a restoration was impossible. He has indicated that as clearly as he could at the beginning of the *Republic* and by the personnel of the *Republic*. The personnel of the *Republic*, I mean the characters there apart from the Socrates, to the extent to which they are not foreigners simply—like Thrasymachus and so were, some of them at any rate—were victims of the restoration, of the reaction or the restoration which was tried by Critias and, you know, the Thirty Tyrants.<sup>v</sup> That is quite interesting.<sup>33</sup> And Plato himself says in the Seventh Letter [that] he had to begin with, as a very young boy of twenty, a certain sympathy for this restoration attempt, but after a very short time the old democracy, which he loathed, appeared to him like the Golden Age—look what an expression, “like the Golden Age”—compared with the beastliness of his own relatives, such people like Critias and Charmides, the tyrants.<sup>vi</sup> So I mean Plato had no delusions. The only remedy they could find was that this glibness of tongue could be put to the right use, and then it would be even<sup>34</sup> higher than the ancestral polity.

**Same Student:** Then is Aristophanes suggesting his . . . portrait?

**LS:** Something of this—yes, something of this kind. Yes,<sup>35</sup> Aristophanean comedy is of course novel, and his pride is this novelty of which I spoke. But this novelty is at the same time an attempt to preserve in a different medium, and therefore in an altered form, the old: to defend the *polis*. Surely, there is no question. I mean, that he knew. But the simple terms in which the problem is stated and frequently . . . does not do justice to what Aristophanes wants. Aristophanes is compelled by the fact that he writes comedies to present everything, in particular this issue, in gross and crude terms. You want to say something at this point, Mr. Haight?

**Mr. Haight:** I pass.

**LS:** Good. Now<sup>36</sup> is there any other point you want to bring up?

**Student:**<sup>vii</sup> I’m still not clear on what justice is according to Aristophanes. Is it the old morality? Is it something else?

**LS:** Ya, the question is an excellent question, but I think you will seek in vain, as far as I can see, a definition of justice by Aristophanes. But can we not reconstruct such a definition by what we have read in other authors?<sup>37</sup> You see, in authors like Plato and Aristotle there are *n* levels, levels of the highest refinement and also levels of the greatest crudity. Now one has of course to look primarily for these *crude* notions of justice. Now what is the most primitive definition of justice

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<sup>v</sup> In 411 the democracy in Athens had been overthrown, from within, and replaced by an oligarchy known as the Four Hundred. This coup in turn gave way to a broader oligarchy, the Five Thousand, and this latter oligarchy to a restored democracy. In 404, following the victory of Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans created in Athens a new oligarchy known as the Thirty. Finally, in the following year the democracy was again restored.

<sup>vi</sup> Plato (or pseudo-Plato), *Seventh Letter* 324d. Critias and Charmides were Plato’s uncles.

<sup>vii</sup> The student who read the paper at the beginning of the session.

which occurs in Plato or Aristotle and which<sup>38</sup> on reflection proves to be untenable but which is good enough for many practical purposes?

**Student:** Returning deposits.

**LS:** That is already too subtle. There is a much cruder one.

**Student:** Give to each his due?

**LS:** Oh, that's still more—that's the same as what Mr. Kendrick says, only yours is more sophisticated. [Laughter] No.

**Student:** Obedience to the law?

**LS:** Sure, to obey the law. The opposite of justice is violence, or maybe fraud. But a just man is a man who<sup>39</sup> is law-abiding. That's clear, and that he surely means. Now then of course there comes up this little question: Is everything which was passed,<sup>40</sup> every measure passed by the assembly in a moment of hysteria brought about by hysterical speeches of demagogues, is this a law? No, of course not. A law is a way of determination which has lasted for a long time: the *old* law. And that of course includes all such things as family, the crude prohibition against theft, robbery, and murder, and so on and so on. This is what we still understand; I mean, in our ordinary speech about these matters, we understand a square versus a crook. That is the first orientation we have . . . justice. Ya? And then naturally we know that sometimes a crook is not as crookish as he seems to be, and a square is not as square as he seems to be; and therefore we have to ascend, and there the difficulties arise, so that is of course what Aristophanes himself does to some extent. And then if we take this beautiful traditional definition of justice to which we refer, justice is a constant perpetual will to give everyone what is his due. Surely, but who determines what is a man's due? The law. Absolutely. But the law may do it in an unjust manner, ya?. And therefore one would have to go to the question: What is due to a man by *nature*, not by mere human arbitrary act? And there the difficulties arise, but even there we have certain notions, crude notions; for example, one rule which is not a matter of mere positive law, "first come, first served," which has a certain legitimacy, without any question. But he who cares sufficiently to get up at six in the morning or five in the morning to be the first in line, whereas the other fellow is lazing in bed and comes at eleven, the latter one cannot complain when the things are distributed. You know? That is one rule. Another rule of this kind which is more important, perhaps, is that<sup>41</sup> the wiser, and the more responsible, the more public spirited, should have a greater say in the community than the foolish and irresponsible and purely selfish. Ya? And so<sup>42</sup> all kinds of things—.

But a poet is under no obligation to write a treatise on that. Plato and Aristotle were to different degrees—Aristotle certainly did it very well in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, where he has a long treatise in which all these things which are generally cleared up in such—well, if they are properly commented, they are really exhaustive, you might say. But a comment would be necessary, indeed; I mean, not that Aristotle omitted anything, but he is very laconic. And then there are certain things which simply have to be left by their very nature to mere arbitrariness. The most simple example is of course right and left driving. It is by nature not more just to drive

right than to drive left. Ya? But<sup>43</sup> take such a question like property, which is, I think, really the central problem, because that murder is to be forbidden is, I think, not a controversial issue in any society. You know? I think there is no movement in this country for the abolition, I don't say of capital punishment, but of punishment for murder. But nor, for that matter, of theft and robbery, or embezzlement. But the question of course is the ways in which property is distributed in society as a whole, which depends somehow on law. You know that there are legal ways of confiscating property, i.e., of robbing people, and the old argument was: What's the difference whether a highway robber takes away your money or the *polis* in [the] form of a law? Is it not also robbery? Great questions. Really great questions, because it is clear that the *polis*, if it is to be respected, cannot behave like a robber, so they must have a good ground for that. Now the good ground usually given is of course the public good. But is it not an essential part of the public good to consider the property rights, the preexisting property rights, the preexisting inequalities? Or is perhaps this inequality the root of all injustice, as Rousseau, for example, said and the socialists after him said? That raises of course a very important question, the really fundamental question: Is an absolutely egalitarian society in this respect possible and desirable, or is it not? If inequality is necessary, then of course one could rightly say: Why should the injustice that Mr. X has inherited a million and Mr. Y has inherited zero be changed all the time, that for once Mr. Y gets a million and Mr. X gets nothing? It is this turmoil, this upheaval in any proportion, apart from private greed and envy. And should one not leave it at the ordinary traditional ways of inequalities? You know? And so on.

These are of course the fundamental questions regarding justice and I'm sure, I have no doubt that Aristophanes was on the whole in favor of a very "quote conservative" policy. I mean, that there are certain ways of acquiring property which are regarded as just—just by purchasing, and so on—must be protected; others, which are unjust, simply taken away by force or fraud, are forbidden and must be punished, and these elementary things he accepted without any doubt. That there are difficulties there, deeper difficulties, I'm sure he was aware of, just as Plato was aware of; and he would have admitted, I think, that there is a certain point where a kind of crude convention is the only way out. The alternative would be anarchy destructive of all stability.<sup>44</sup> But this one must emphasize, whether it is a crude convention or whether it is a lucid law of reason, because if it is a lucid law of reason, no exceptions can be permitted under any circumstances. If it is a crude rule of thumb, then it can be modified if circumstances arise where higher consideration demands such a modification. That, I think, is the issue.

So the people who speak so much of the conventional character are not necessarily enemies of civilization, you know, but they may only mean that all rules of actions, of which laws are the most important part—whether any rules of actions can be strictly speaking universally valid, and whether the nature of human affairs is incompatible with any universally valid rules of action. That's the problem. And the standard was for the ancient thinkers always nature, the nature of man, the nature of human associations; and which I think that all gives for broad purpose sufficiently clear directive, not for any individual case, because every individual case is different from the other and what you can do for the individual case is to have crude decisions. In the majority of cases this is the best thing, but there was always admitted the necessity of a translegal redress called equity, or department powers or what have you, if such things existed, and also such things as emergency powers, you know, in emergency situations requiring them. This, I think, is the political meaning of that. I mean, you have good examples today. For example, the

issue regarding birth control, where you have on the one hand the proposition<sup>45</sup>—I will overstate it for the sake of clarity—that it is simply bad, and the others who say that it depends on circumstances and so on. Yes?

**Student:**<sup>viii</sup> Would you say then that Aristophanes suggests that the prohibition against incest, the sacredness of the family, is illicit for a reason, but that it has to be backed up by something sacred or else it will be broken?

**LS:** Ya, sure. Yes, I mean this extreme example, and this extremely shocking example, of incest is of course<sup>46</sup> exactly the point. We cannot perhaps easily visualize a situation in which incest can be defensible. The simplest way of arguing is that we take the most sacred text for the Western world, the Bible, and we see that according to this account there were situations where incest was absolutely necessary for the survival of the human race. The first generation. We cannot know what would happen after a nuclear disaster, where human beings might be confronted with this situation. Should the human race perish, or should they do this most horrible thing as a way for survival,<sup>47</sup> [for] a recovery of man? We cannot know that. That is a very harsh thing to contemplate. But let us take an example which is simpler, the famous story of the two men on a raft. The alternative is suicide or murder: both forbidden things, but they have no choice. That is the problem, I mean, that the ancient thinkers saw.

There is only one solution, a crude solution which of course was taken by some people there, and which plays a great role in the beginning of modern political philosophy in men like Machiavelli and Hobbes, and that is simply to say: That shows you that there is no justice. Because when you go to the tough cases, the extreme cases, no solution, no just solution can be suggested. But then one can of course also take exactly the opposite point of view and say the extreme cases prove absolutely nothing regarding the normal cases. But one can admit that there are extreme cases in which justice fades into injustice without any possibility of distinction and still say: That doesn't say that justice is merely an arbitrary human arrangement. Now let me see; there are some examples of that. Yes, I think that is, I would say,<sup>48</sup> the simple difference between Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and, say, Machiavelli and Hobbes: that for Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle the orientation is by the normal case.

Oh, yes, in present-day, so-called existentialist literature this problem comes up of course again, with a deep unawareness of the oldness of the problem. I remember a statement by Sartre on this case in France, 1940—or no, '41—in the German Occupation. A<sup>49</sup> young [French] boy, [and] the only decent member of the family, his mother—the others are all collaborators whom he despises, the father, the brother, and so on—and he wants to fight for France, Free French, and he's in this conflict of duties: Shall he go to de Gaulle, shall he join de Gaulle, what he thinks is his duty, and then his mother, remaining alone, will perish, or shall he stay with his mother? In other words, a conflict of duty between the country and the mother. Such things exist, and I think<sup>50</sup> it is not “quote realistic unquote” to deny that there can be such insoluble conflicts. The conclusion which such people like Sartre draw is: this is the normal situation regarding morality. That he doesn't say, but the whole doctrine is based on that, whereas one could rightly<sup>51</sup> draw the other conclusion: Why did the French not fight in 1940, or rather before? And then this problem would not—in other words, is there not a responsibility there for a situation in which the most

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<sup>viii</sup> The student who read the paper at the beginning of the session.

elementary human problems become insoluble problems? Once they have arisen in certain situations, there is no way of acting clearly and with a clear conscience anymore, but to say that man can under *no* circumstances act with a clear conscience is of course an absurd conclusion. So existentialism is in this respect simply connected with this way of looking at the moral problem from the extremes and not from the normal case. So we see our problems—what we study in Aristophanes is not very far from us, not merely ancient history. Mr. Burd?

**Mr. Burd:** I'm just curious. If you take those two speeches in the *Clouds*, the Just Logic and the Unjust Logic—

**LS:** What logic? Don't forget that logic does not exist prior to Aristotle. It does not even exist in Aristotle, but in a crude way you could say it exists in Aristotle. Yes, the word.

**Mr. Burd:** One defending the brutish morality, and the other defending a traditional morality. Well, Aristophanes certainly does not favor the brutish, and he doesn't present us in these three plays with a traditional person.<sup>52</sup> If they are, they're corrupted traditionals. Now in light of that—

**LS:** But what about the dicasts in the *Wasps*? The jurymen?

**Mr. Burd:** Yes, well but—

**LS:** You mean the individuals. Yes.

**Mr. Burd:** <sup>53</sup>Yes, but even with the dicasts, the point you worried about, there has been a break. There is a break in their condition, and<sup>54</sup> there is no longer the same social condition, let us say, which allowed them to exist in a type of rural golden age which may have existed before. Now<sup>55</sup> I'm trying to find a common denominator between three situations in the three plays, the situations of the final scenes in all the plays: Strepsiades's burning out of Socrates; Peisthetaerus's final victory, in a sense; and Philocleon's dancing in the streets. I mean, if these are perhaps symbolic or actual statements of what Aristophanes considers as a just reconciliation of the situation, I can't figure that out.

**LS:** Yes. No, that is perfectly correct.<sup>56</sup> I mean, I would state it slightly differently. The fact that the *Clouds* has an unhappy ending—if an unhappy ending in a comic manner, not in a tragic manner, no killing—whereas the two other plays have happy endings; surely they do, there is no question.

**Mr. Burd:** And then the second thing is that in two of the plays, in the *Wasps* and the *Birds*, there's some kind of creative element in the ending, if you can call it creative.

**LS:** No, you can't.

**Mr. Burd:** You can't. Well, I—

**LS:** You create a concert.<sup>57</sup> You know what that means? You vote or you elect a concert. Or God creates the world. That's also possible. But<sup>58</sup> if you want to speak appropriately, you cannot speak of creation. But say "inventions."

**Mr. Burd:** All right, inventions. There are two inventive situations and one not inventive, or one which doesn't seem to lead to anything, perhaps, in the same inventive manner: the *Clouds*.

**LS:** Ya, but in the first place, granted that Socrates was a man who actually lived, whereas it is safe to say that Philocleon and Bdelycleon were inventions of the poet—and Peisthetaerus and Euelpides were invented persons, that is quite true, but otherwise, invention of course abounds in the *Clouds*. I mean, did you ever hear a cloud speak? Did you ever<sup>59</sup> see a Just Speech and an Unjust Speech coming up and having a discussion with one another?

**Mr. Burd:** Yes, well I was thinking in terms of the final statement of the play, of the suggestion of . . . a category, or by the way the situation finally evolved and what it means. Why do the plays end in this way?

**LS:** Yes, but because what Socrates does deserves to be punished; what Peisthetaerus does and what Bdelycleon does to his father do not deserve to be punished. Why not take these simple points? I mean, let us not underestimate these things. I mean, our abstract art in every field makes us oblivious of these very elementary things which are so crucial, the visible things. For example, *Madame Bovary*.<sup>ix</sup> Ya? The novel. That Madame Bovary perishes in a most terrible manner, and this absolutely miserable and degrading end is absolutely essential for understanding the very nobility of this woman. But<sup>60</sup> I mean, that is true, I think, of every scientific or scholarly activity: the most important things are the immediately visible things. Not<sup>61</sup> that they give us a why, the cause, the reason, but they are the indispensable starting point for any understanding. And<sup>62</sup> I think that applies also to the Shakespearean plays, by the way. These massive facts—the happy ending, the unhappy ending, and other things of this same crudeness—must never be minimized. They are not sufficient; otherwise there would be no difference between a Shakespearean tragedy and a Western movie, but one must also not forget what Shakespeare has in common with the Western movies. There is a kind of false sophistication, which one may very well call snobbism, which is as dangerous to the understanding as mere stupidity. You know, by "mere stupidity" I mean unawareness of differences of that kind.

**Mr. Burd:** I think I more care about the reasons. Yes, I completely agree with you, but the reasons—

**LS:** Yes, but you have to assent to the reasons. Then you have to see, what is it<sup>63</sup> [that] makes Socrates's fate in the *Clouds* deserved and<sup>64</sup> what is it what makes Philocleon, a much more abominable man than Socrates, what makes his happy end deserved. But if the solution is not in the play, it can be found and it may still be there. Theoretically you cannot exclude that Aristophanes wrote the play in a state of complete schizophrenia, drunkenness, or what have you, and for some reason the vulgar applauded it because there were some funny scenes in it and so it has been preserved. That is, prior to investigation everything is possible. And that is of

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<sup>ix</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (1856).

course the burden of Mr. Haight's criticism, that what he says are absolute verities, but which are true—which precede any empirical investigation. Whether that is a fair criticism of your whole statement of course I cannot say because I haven't read it, but you tend in this direction. Now—

**Student:** I . . . that's all.

**LS:** Good. Now then let us turn to the *Wasps*. Or did you want to—?

Now you will have seen that the play begins with a long scene where none of the two chief characters appears,<sup>65</sup> whereas in the *Clouds* and the *Birds* a chief character, if not the chief characters, appear immediately. This also belongs to these externals which we have discussed. . . . And it is a conversation between two slaves of Philocleon. They are on guard duty, but sleepy. They dream. Apparently they dream things presaging evil, but the dreams are political dreams: they dream about Athens. Slaves dream about the city. Is this not strange? They dream of the city as theirs. That<sup>66</sup> [sheds] some light on Athens. Does it ring a bell? Plato's description of democracy in the eighth book of the *Republic*, the distinction between citizens and slaves has lost its power.<sup>x</sup> But these omens prove to be good omens after they have been interpreted, and that is perhaps a kind of prelude to the whole thing. Some bad omens, some things which prove to be bad omens, like the jurymen, for example, and the excess of the jury, prove to be good omens in the end.

Now at this point, the wise interpreter of the second dream speaks to the audience in the name of the poet. That's interesting. You know, not only the Chorus speaks in the name of the poet; other individuals also may do that. And he tells the audience that they should not expect very much from this play. No such themes as Cleon will come out. Yet<sup>67</sup> in spite of the fact that it is a very small thing, the comedy is wiser, cleverer, and more thoughtful—the Greek word<sup>68</sup> wise implies both, you know: the smart, clever, and also the thoughtful—than the vulgar comedy.<sup>xi</sup>

Now what is the situation? Bdelycleon has locked up his father because the father suffers from an illness. You may lock up your father. For example, let us assume he has pneumonia and is running a 105 temperature and wants to get up, you can use force to keep him in bed. Everyone would admit that, even those most opposed to any violence applied to the father, but what is the illness? Not pneumonia. Perhaps we'll read that, in the translation on page 221, towards the bottom, verse 81<sup>xii</sup> following.

**Reader:**

[Xanthias:] Nay, but the word does really end with –lover.

Then Sosias here observes to Derclius,

That 'tis a *drink*-lover.

[Sosias:] Confound it, no:

That's the disease of honest gentlemen.

[Xan.:] Then next, Nicostratus of Scambon says,

It is a sacrifice- or stranger-lover.

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<sup>x</sup> *Republic* 563b.

<sup>xi</sup> *Sophōteron. Wasps*, line 66.

<sup>xii</sup> The student actually begins at line 77.

[Sos.:] What, like Philoxenus? No, by the dog,  
 Not quite so lewd, Nicostratus, as that.  
 [Xan.:] Come, you waste words: you'll never find it out,  
 So all keep silence if you want to know.  
 I'll tell you the disease old master has.  
 He is a *lawcourt*-lover, no man like him.  
 Judging is what he dotes on, and weeps  
 Unless he sit on the front bench of all. (Wasps, 77-90)

**LS:** Now let us stop here. You see, by the way, in this remark, when he brings out what the disease is he uses a certain oath which is not brought out in the translation, “By the dog,” which played such a great role<sup>69</sup> in Plato’s *Republic*. Now what he says is [that] he is not a lover of strangers. He’s not a lover of strangers. And then the joke is that the word for lover of strangers, *philoxenus*, is now capitalized and used as the proper name of one individual who was a debauched fellow, and that is the case that suited. But the real point is this: he is a lover of sacrifices. Ya? He is a lover of sacrifices. This is not denied. That he is a lover of strangers is denied, and we will see later on that the Wasps are not lovers of strangers by nature. I mean the *polis*, the fellow citizens, not the Wasps. But he is a lover of sacrifices; this is stated to begin with. And he is surely not lewd. And he’s a man of a bad temper, a hanging judge. His son is opposed to this. After having vainly tried all other means, he keeps his father prisoner. Then there follows a scene which demonstrates the situation. Philocleon, the father, tries to break out, and he’s prevented from doing so by his son and the two slaves. You see, it’s also important that the slaves force their master. You know? The natural order is destroyed in both respects. Turn to page 224, top, which is verse 156, following.

**Reader:**

[Philocleon:] Let me out, villains! let me out to judge.  
 What, shall Dracontides escape unpunished?  
 [Bdelycleon:] What if he should?  
 [Phi.:] Why once, when I consulted  
 The Delphian oracle, the God replied,  
 That I should wither if a man escaped me.  
 [Bde.:] Apollo shield us, what a prophecy! (156-161)

**LS:** Yes. You see, that’s the point. You see the lover of oracles induced originally by a Delphian oracle to become a hanging judge. That’s a great theme going through the play. His motive is a sense of duty imposed upon him by the Delphian oracle.

Now then there is a funny scene where Philocleon escapes from his judge—no, from his prison, like Odysseus. Under what kind of a creature was it?

**Student:** An ass.

**LS:** An ass, yes. You know,<sup>70</sup> with Odysseus it was a ram. Yes, what does Philocleon have to do with Odysseus? Well, that is something very simple, and what most superficial characteristic, which everyone remembers,<sup>71</sup> links Odysseus with a hanging judge?



**Student:** Trojans.

**LS:** No, no. At the end, the slaying of the suitors. A terrific act of revenge and beautifully prepared; and he enjoys the revenge, every bit of it. But also in the very scene here with Polyphemus, where he escapes: also revenge. The revenge of Odysseus, but it may mean more. And of course Odysseus is a friend of the goddess Athena, the special friend of Athena, which we must never forget.

Now Bdelycleon scolds his father in very harsh terms and forces him back into the house. He uses violence against his own father. The father calls for help from Cleon and his fellow jurymen. The fellow jurymen turn up as a matter of course. Cleon never does. Philocleon proves to be the harshest of all judges. Harsh like a stone. Yes, we cannot possibly read everything. That is really very bad. This scene. Now Philocleon comes<sup>72</sup> to the jurymen, and he is conscious of having done something evil. In other words, what the god commands him to do is to be harsh to others, to do evil to others. But only one point on page 230, on the second half, which we might read. I have in mind verses 340 following.

**Reader:**

[Phi.:] He will let me do no mischief, and no more a lawsuit try.  
True it is he'll feast and pet me, but with that I won't comply. (340-341)

**LS:** Ya. Now that is a very succinct statement of the situation. The son does not wish his father to do evil anymore. He wants his father to feast. What could be more fair and more nice? So the right is absolutely on the side of the son here. But in this connection it is made clear that there is a great difference—not emphasized, but we have to think for a moment—between Philocleon and the Chorus, the other jurymen. Philocleon does not have the motivation of the others. He is not poor. He's plainly vicious; that's the only reason why he wants to be a judge. And he traces his viciousness, as we have seen, to the Delphian oracle. His son will cure him of his viciousness and therefore justly uses force against his father. Pheidippides in the *Clouds* and the young man in the *Birds* who came to the founding did not justly use force.<sup>73</sup> In other words, here in this place Aristophanes answers the question: Under what condition can a son legitimately use force against his father? Here we have it. But the Chorus is shocked by such an atrocious behavior, and he suspects Bdelycleon of being subversive in everything: a lover of tyranny, antidemocratic. Then there is a discussion between the Chorus and father as to how he can get out. The only way is to gnaw through the meshes, but thereafter he may be attacked by his son and the two slaves. But the Chorus assures him of protection. Look at page 232, bottom, verse 387 following, where the Chorus assures Philocleon that he doesn't run any risk. Do you have that?

**Reader:**

[Chorus:] O nothing, nothing will happen to you: keep up, old comrade, your heart and hope;  
First breathe a prayer to your father's gods: then let yourself down by the trusty rope.

**LS:** Go on.

**Reader:**

[Phi.:] O Lycus, neighbour and hero and lord! thou lovest the same-self pleasures  
as I;  
Day after day we both enjoy the suppliant's tears and his wailing cry.  
Thou camest here thine abode to fix, on purpose to listen to sounds so sweet,  
The only hero of all that deigns by the mourner's side to assume his seat. (387-392)

**LS:** That is all we need for our purpose. Ya? In other words, you see, the element of viciousness links up now with a hero, with heroes in the strict sense: a demigod who also enjoys seeing men suffering. Now then Philocleon still tries to get out, yet is discovered while he lets himself down. He is threatened with blows. And the Chorus now sends for help to Cleon. In the meantime, a dialogue develops between Bdelycleon and the Chorus. The accusations are again repeated, very harsh: Bdelycleon is an antidemocrat, subversive, tyrant. Again he makes clear that<sup>xiii</sup> —but due to custom, to *ethos*. It is an acquired law. No one would do this today. Here the argument between the father and son begins. The son observes that the dicasts are slaves and not the rulers, whereas his father asserts that he rules over all. And it is made clear that the argument concerns the whole polity, the whole political order: Who is ruling in Athens?<sup>74</sup> You see, the question is not a private question anymore; it concerns the whole affair. If you turn to page 240, lines 3 to 4, verse 546 following.

**Reader:**

[Ch.:] O friend upon whom it devolves to plead the cause of our Sovereign Power  
to-day,  
Now show us your best; now bring to the test each trick that an eloquent tongue  
can play. (456-457)

**LS:** Yes. So the Chorus then encourages him, literally translated, “on the whole kingship,” what he says here, “sovereignty,” “Sovereign Power.” The whole kingship, that is the issue. Now<sup>75</sup> the father's thesis is this: Our rule, the rule of the jurymen, is not inferior to kingship in any sense. The jurymen is treated like a god; his rule is irresponsible, without appeal. Let us turn to page 243, bottom, verse 620.

**Reader:**

[Phi.:] “Is *this* not a fine dominion of mine? Is it less than the empire of Zeus?”

**LS:** Imagine:<sup>76</sup> this lover of sacrifices, commissioned by the Delphian god, exercises himself godly power. Yes?

**Reader:**

[Phi.:] Why the very same phrases, so grand and divine,  
For me, as for Him, are in use.  
For when we are raging loud and high  
In stormy, tumultuous din,  
*O Lord! O Zeus!* say the passers-by,

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<sup>xiii</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

*How thunders the Court within!*

The wealthy and great, when my lightnings glare,  
Turn pale and sick, and mutter a prayer.  
You fear me too: I protest you do:  
Yes, yes, by Demeter I vow 'tis true.  
But hang me if I am afraid of you. (620-30)

**LS:** Yes. So. That is only as a specimen. Now then Bdelycleon's response, line 650, that is on page 244, bottom.

**Student:** Where . . .

**LS:** No, the speech of Bdelycleon on page 244, bottom, yes?

**Reader:**

[Bde.:] Hard were the task, and shrewd the intent, for a Comedy-poet all too great  
To attempt to heal an inveterate, old disease engrained in the heart of the state. (650-651)

**LS:** Now let us stop here. "For a comic poet," that is what Bdelycleon says. Through Bdelycleon, the comic poet himself speaks. Bdelycleon is in a way the comic poet, just as the slave spoke for him.<sup>77</sup> Bdelycleon knows that he cannot heal this ancient disease but, that is implied, perhaps the comic poet can supply some relief. Now let us go on where we left off immediately.

**Reader:**

[Bde.:] Yet, Oh dread Cronides, Father and Lord.

**LS:** Yes. Who is that, by the way? Who is the Cronides?

**Student:** Zeus.

**LS:** Zeus, of course. Or "our Father Zeus," he says. Yes? And what does the father reply?

**Reader:**

[Phi.:] Stop, stop, don't talk in that father-me way. (652-653)

**LS:** <sup>78</sup>In other words,<sup>79</sup> he identifies himself with Zeus. We are not surprised. Now Bdelycleon says his proof. Only a very small part of Athenian revenue goes to the alleged rulers of Athens, the jurymen; the bulk goes to the demagogues. If the demagogues wanted, every jurymen could be a rich man which, needless to say, is campaign oratory at its worst, but not in effect. Now let us turn to page 248, top, verse 719. <sup>xiv</sup>

**Reader:**

[Bde.:] Let a panic possess them, they're ready to give Euboea at once for the State to divide,

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<sup>xiv</sup> The student actually begins at line 715.

And engage to supply for every man full fifty bushels of wheat beside.  
 But five poor bushels of barley each is all that you ever obtained in fact,  
 And that doled out by the quart, while first they worry you under the Alien Act. And  
 therefore it was that I locked you away  
 To keep you in ease; unwilling that these  
 With empty mouthings your age should bilk.  
 And now I offer you here to-day  
 Without any reserve whatever you please  
 Save only a draught of—Treasurer's milk.<sup>xv</sup>

**LS:** Yes. Well, you see, Bdelycleon is a super-demagogue. He has to be. You see, that is, by the way, the theme of the comedy the *Knights*, where the upper-class people, the knights, hire the lowest and most lost demagogue to get rid of the ruling demagogue, you know, and this is a similar thing. So he is a super-demagogue. But he speaks only to his father, to whom *he* will give all he wants.<sup>80</sup> He does not promise a change of the law, the division of the whole revenue among the jurymen. The only promise which he makes—and to that extent, he is an honest demagogue<sup>81</sup>—he makes only a promise to his father. If his argument were addressed to the jurymen, it would require a tremendous increase in all forms of social security. But now a surprise, where we last left off immediately. Let me see, the time is a little bit advanced. Could anyone tell me what is the time?

**Student:** Ten minutes to five.

**LS:** Yes. Now I think we drop that, and I mention only this. The Chorus is convinced. The Chorus is convinced by this speech. Although they do not derive any benefit from Bdelycleon's proposal, they are convinced because they identify themselves with the father, with Philocleon. How can this be? I mean, how can you identify yourself with someone else who gets all the money, and you are happy because he gets all the money? How is this possible? Let us use a bit of "psychology" to understand that. Can there be such a vicarious pleasure, and to what extent can it be? That is, I think, a very good observation of the poet, because if people look up to a man as the jurymen look to Philocleon, then they can be satisfied by his satisfaction. I mean, I have heard that some union men are very proud of the elegant Cadillacs driven by the union leaders. These poor fellows don't have such elegant Cadillacs, but they vicariously enjoy that Cadillac. Ya? That happens. And so they are satisfied.<sup>82</sup> Is this a wrong observation?

**Student:** Well—

**LS:** It mustn't be. Let us assume then that it wasn't wrong in this case. What does the poet teach? The *dēmos*, these simple jurymen, are cured because of their basic good natures. Good-naturedness is a word which Aristotle applies to the common people in his *Athenian Constitution*. And this good-naturedness is analyzed a bit: because of their inner dependence on the rich or on certain rich people, the malady of Athens are not the common people, but the demagogues on the one hand and wealthy old men like Philocleon on the other. In this particular play, Aristophanes is not concerned with the demagogues. He emphasizes that by having Cleon

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<sup>xv</sup> Op. cit. 248 (ll. 715-724).

called in, and Cleon never comes out. Cleon is not the theme. The other one is. In the *Wasps*, the theme of the poet is the type represented by Philocleon.

Then the son convinces both the other dicasts and his father. He has done violence to his father and gotten away with it. That's amazing. There is a parallel to that in the oldest play by Aristophanes which has been preserved, the *Acharnians*. A man commits high treason. He makes a private peace with the enemy, with Sparta, during the war, and he is naturally persecuted, as he should be. But then he does one thing. He borrows rags from Euripides—Euripides liked to dress his heroes in rags—and<sup>83</sup> clothed in these rags and with his head on the executioner's block, the man who had committed high treason makes a speech to the citizen body, the . . . gunfighters, the American Legion, and he succeeds in splitting them, and then he's free. Once a substantial part of the community is on your side, the mere law can no longer be enforced. That is that. So you can get away with high treason under certain conditions. Here it is shown you can get away with beating<sup>84</sup> [your] own father under certain conditions. He got away with it. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, in listening to his son the demagogue, he changes his opinion. He judges his previous opinion. Is this judgment evil? If he has been judging evilly in the past, doing mischief, is he doing mischief at this point when he judges his past opinion to be bad, condemns his past opinion and is convinced by his son?

**LS:** Yes, but he is only convinced of one point: that he is not as powerful<sup>85</sup> in Athens as he believed he was. Only of that. The question of hanging or condemning did not come up. He only was strutting around and saying: Everyone depends on me. I'm as powerful in Athens as Zeus is in the universe. And then his son proves to him by simple statistics about the revenue of Athens that he is wrong. If he were so powerful as a jurymen, he would get, say, ten thousand a year and he gets only two hundred a year. Well, if that doesn't prove it, I don't know what could prove it. That is it. The hanging is not a question.

Now Philocleon has been convinced that he does not rule like a king or a god, but he cannot give up his real inclination, namely, to sit in judgment and to condemn. This is the only thing he cannot give up. And therefore the compromise: he's permitted to act as a judge in his house where the activity is anyway more pleasant. Well, take a simple thing, an innocent example, I suppose. I never was on a jury: you can't smoke cigarettes while sitting on a jury bench; at home you can smoke cigarettes. And he gives some Greek equivalents for that thing. Now then the very funny scene where the court sitting takes place in the house, and there is one verse; I don't know whether I'll find it easily.<sup>86</sup> We must now really rush disgracefully. There is a remark of Bdelycleon in verse 834, where he says: What's the matter? How terrible is the addiction to locality, to a place and to what is customary in that place.<sup>xvi</sup> You see, the father is in a way a typical patriarch, but in a somewhat problematic way; and that means attachment to the local and to the old for its own sake. Bdelycleon does not have that.

Now there is a beautiful presentation of the same problem in prose in Xenophon's *Greek History*. There he has given a description of two leading Greek generals, at the beginning of the third book. Two Spartans. One is the famous king Agesilaus, who is really a model of a king; I mean a Colonel Blimp and—how should I say?—in a way [like] other generals of whom you may know

<sup>xvi</sup> *Wasps*, line 834. The "addiction" to which Strauss refers is *philochōria*.

and so. But then there is another fellow, and<sup>87</sup> he is very militant but he proves to be hopelessly inefficient. He destroys what his predecessor had done without any fuss, and what he had finished, completed in ten days. The name of this predecessor is Dercylidas [LS writes on the blackboard], whom everyone called Sisyphus. Sisyphus means not in the sense most known today, but the super-clever Sisyphus. Super-clever Sisyphus. And that was the grandfather of Odysseus; [he] was called Sisyphus. And he did a magnificent job without any fuss. Now this man, who was such a perfectly wonderful fellow and also very humane and nice, was however punished, for example, for not being very strict—for some *ataxia*, for some lack of discipline when he was with the Spartan army in Byzantium. And especially he has another quality which Xenophon calls, with an intranslatable word, *philapodēmia*:<sup>xvii</sup> he likes to be away from the *dēmos*, he likes to be away from home.<sup>xviii</sup> You know, that is a similar feature, it seems to be characteristic of Bdelycleon. Still, the son is praised by his father for doing everything according to the manners of the country.

Now there is a sacrifice prior to the sitting, and Bdelycleon prays. Ya, that we might read, on page 253, second half, that is verse 875 following. The long speech of Bdelycleon on the second half of 253. The prayer.

**Reader:**

[Bde.:] Agueus! my neighbour and hero and lord! who dwellest in front of my vestibule gate,  
I pray thee be graciously pleased to accept the rite that we new for my father create.

**LS:** Note the emphasis on novelty, yes? He introduces a new rite. A new rite. He made an innovation.

**Reader:**

[Bde.:] O bend to a pliant and flexible mood the stubborn and resolute oak of his will,  
And into his heart, so crusty and tart, a trifle of honey for syrup instil.  
Endue him with sympathies wide,  
A sweet and humane disposition,  
Which leans to the side of the wretch that is tried,  
And weeps at a culprit's petition.  
From harshness and anger to turn,  
May it now be his constant endeavour,

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<sup>xvii</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenica* 4.3.2 (*philapodēmos*).

<sup>xviii</sup> Strauss's summary is unclear. Xenophon begins the third book by describing the actions of the Spartan general Thibron, who after unsuccessfully laying siege to Larisa, was replaced by Dercylidas (*Hellenica* 3.1.7-8). Xenophon relates that Dercylidas's skill was far superior to that of Thibron (3.1.10), that Dercylidas was able to take Larisa in a single day (3.1.16), and that Dercylidas ultimately took nine cities in eight days (3.2.1). It is possible, therefore, that where Strauss says "predecessor," he means "successor." Such an emendation would be supported by the fact that Agesilaus himself (whose description does not begin until 3.3.1) succeeds Dercylidas (3.4.3 ff.). However, this emendation would render Strauss's statement, "He destroys what his predecessor had done . . ." nonsensical.

And out of his temper the stern  
Sharp sting of the nettle to sever. (875-884)

**LS:** Yes. That's all we need. You see, the harshness of Philocleon appears in contrast to the gentleness of the *dēmos*, as presented in deed. Now that is the scene of which Miss Hill reported last time, of the trial of the dog. He has to judge somebody, and at least a dog, you see. And it shows that Philocleon hasn't changed at all: he's as eager to condemn as he was before. But his son deceives him into acquitting the poor dog, and he's rather shocked by it. And at the end of this, on page 257, middle, we will see the motivation becomes clear again. The motivation is piety. He thinks he commits a sin by acquitting.

The little joke, by the way, is this. There was a lawsuit against Laches, who is known to you from a Platonic dialogue [LS writes on the blackboard] called *Laches*, and here there was some affair in Sicily where Cleon prosecuted him. And the dog is called Labes, you know . . . from Latin . . . in Greek, and Labes comes from the Greek word *lambanō*, which means "take": to take away, to steal. The taker. That's a vulgar joke which links it up with the contemporary situation.

Now this piety is to be replaced by pleasure, and this pleasure is meant to include love of human beings, kindness, philanthropy. Now then the *parabasis*: the Chorus, speaking for the poet, says, admiring the poet's courage in attacking monsters like Cleon—which he does not do in his plays, by the way—and his novel inventions. You see the two elements: the political action—let us call it the poet's justice—and his inventiveness, his cleverness. These are the two sides, the two claims placed by the poet.

The Chorus consists of the jurymen,<sup>88</sup> of true-born Athenian citizens. They are *the* defenders of Athens against the Persian invasion. That was the greatest moment where their waspishness, their stings, their anger showed at its best. The word anger sometimes used is the word *thymos*, which is only translated by "spiritedness," the key theme of Plato's *Republic*: spiritedness, the quality of the guardians. That is characteristic of the citizens. At that time they did not yet know how to speak well, but they were concerned [with] who was the best sailor or soldier: real guys. Thus they became the founders of the Athenian empire. They are proud of having stings, which means [proud] of being harsh-spirited and ill-tempered, these terms, and they are proud of that because that is the condition<sup>89</sup> for winning a war. A war is not won by soapiness. They were distempered to the highest degree, both in war and in peace. Their vindictiveness in law courts is only the reverse side of their prowess in battle. The only political reform which they want is limitation of full citizen rights to those who have served in the army—a defensible position to take. It is not<sup>90</sup> altogether reasonable, because someone might be bodily unable to bear arms and might be good in counsel. We know that famous problem. But that these simple men would think that way is perfectly defensible. So<sup>91</sup> there is a praise of waspishness. There is a right kind of waspishness against a foreign enemy; there is a wrong kind against fellow citizens. And what the poet attacks is only the wrong kind, naturally. Bdelycleon, the son, tries to change his father. Yes, this is in a way<sup>92</sup> crucial.

Now the next scene: Bdelycleon tries to change his father. So what is implied we must not forget: the first substitute for condemning, public condemning, is domestic condemning. And that worked out well because of the trickery of Bdelycleon. But [there was] no conversion of the

father, because the father wants to condemn, too. You remember the son tricked him. So the son tries now a more radical cure: he tries to change his father into a fashionable gentleman. Now these are very amusing scenes, which we unfortunately cannot read. If you would turn to 266, bottom. Yes. Now, well, we can't read that. He gives him specimens of how people converse in polite society. You see? That they talk about special subjects and so on—I mentioned it last time. Drink and laughter of gentlemen.<sup>93</sup>

The father goes into polite society, but that's a complete failure. He doesn't behave like such a fine gentleman at all. A slave gives him a report of the vulgar and vicious conduct of that old fellow at the dinner. Philocleon now becomes the object of judicial proceedings,<sup>94</sup> which he now despises, you see, because he's on the receiving end. He promises his inheritance to the flute-girl when his son is dead. He mistakes his son for his father—you see how drunk he is—and he's prepared to beat his son, which means of course his father. You see, he's a completely changed man. But nothing of this kind is happening because he's too drunk for that, and he's brought to his house, by force, by his son. Then there is another scene where the Chorus approves<sup>95</sup> of the son's conduct. I mean, in other words, what the son did to his father, his using force against him, is perfectly decent, as these guardians of decency, the jurymen, say. And the Chorus even expresses its admiration for the son. In a way, the son is the comic poet. There is a reconciliation between the *demos* and the comic poet. Now let me see whether we find that easily. Yes, let us read the speech at the top of page 274, the slave speaking. Do you have that?

**Reader:**

[Xan.:] O Dionysus! here's a pretty mess  
 Into our house some power has whirligigged.  
 Soon as the old man heard the pipe, and drank  
 The long untasted wine, he grew so merry  
 He won't stop dancing all the whole night through  
 Those strange old dances such as Thespis taught;  
 And your new bards he'll prove old fools, he says,  
 Dancing against them in the lists directly. (1474-1481)

**LS:** Yes. In a way, he is the old reactionary, ya? But on the other hand, he is in a way more fashionable than the reactionaries, because he says it's modern tragedians—the modern tragic poets, they are old fogies. You see, there is a kind of coincidence with extreme reactionaryism and extreme morality. It's a complicated situation.

Well, in the final scene Philocleon parodies, ridicules the dances of today. And that ends with—there is no mayhem anymore. And all these terrible scenes with the flute-girl and with—what kind of woman was that? What did she sell? I mean, I forgot what it was.

**Student:** She was a baker.

**LS:** A baker. Yes, well,<sup>96</sup> he beat up people and was absolutely scandalous, but now he behaves in a legal manner. That is, the end is peaceful, the end is happy.



Now I would like to make this remark in conclusion about the play. The play proves to us one thing which has been of great interest to us in the two previous plays. A man may use force against his own father, namely, in order to prevent him from evildoing and in order to turn him to a life of pleasure, of innocent pleasure. Such violence is legitimate if the force is used for the benefit of the father and/or the *polis*. Look at the beautiful beginning of the *Republic*, where the definition comes: justice is restoring deposits. And then the objection comes: Yes, but [what] if the fellow [who] has gotten hold of the knife or the submachine gun has become mad in the meantime? Of course not! How? Then justice is not simply identical with returning deposits.<sup>xix</sup> Now apply it to your father, which Plato doesn't do explicitly in this place. Surely<sup>97</sup> the duties to a mad father cannot be the same as the duties to a non-mad father. Ya? That's important. So the mere paternity doesn't make it. And then we have to take it further.

Now then of course we must consider, as I said already last time, the particular *kind* of madness of the father: harshness, vindictiveness, stings. Ya, but the stings are not altogether bad. The stings are needed against the foreign enemy. The *polis* needs ill-temperedness. Plato has used a more delicate term than "ill-tempered"; let's say he has called it "spiritedness." But don't forget what Plato says about the characters of the guardians of the republic. They are to be like dogs: kind to their acquaintances and ill-tempered towards strangers. He says so.<sup>xx</sup> Aristotle blames him for that, but Plato says it. He says—you know, like a vicious dog if he is not a fellow-citizen. This element of Aristotle is very gentlemanly and tries to keep out all harsh things from the *Politics*, and he succeeds to a very great extent—not completely, because he has to bring in slavery in this funny way, you know, in the first book. Some people know only this of Aristotle, namely, slavery, but they don't know how complicated that issue in [Aristotle]<sup>xxi</sup> is. We may take this up on another occasion.

All right. The *polis* needs a certain amount of ill-temperedness. Viciousness, I will call it; harshness. And I think that is empirically true every day and applies to the kindest societies as well as to the unkindest. Only the difference of degrees is very important in practice. Now the city can avoid war, and perhaps it should avoid war—surely unnecessary wars. But let us assume it succeeds in avoiding war for an unusually long time. What will happen? Will<sup>98</sup> [everything] be<sup>99</sup> honey and milk? Not at all. The stings will become effective against fellow citizens. And that is what is presented here. Yes, well, you can say that is the dogmatic [prejudice]. For the time being, I am willing to settle for that. It was a dogmatic prejudice of Aristophanes that there is no possibility of eradication of these stings. Ya?<sup>100</sup> But I would say, if you mean it from an angle [from] which I fear you might mean it, I would defer to a man called Sigmund Freud, who said something about the impossibility of eradicating stings, in his language. Is that not true? Good. So I have some social science support for Aristophanes. By the way, remember this beautiful story in the *Birds*: the father-beater,<sup>101</sup> who has also this vicious desire to beat someone, is sent off to *war* in Thrace against a foreign enemy. Also the war against the foreigners is less vicious than the war against your nearest and dearest.

Now this stingingness,<sup>102</sup> this waspishness is true of all wasps, but not quite of the hero of the play. He is a special kind. He is characterized by a special kind of waspishness which is

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<sup>xix</sup> *Republic* 331e-332b.

<sup>xx</sup> *Republic* 416a-b.

<sup>xxi</sup> Strauss says "Aristophanes," presumably in error.

derivative, which is traced to the Delphic oracle. If I can use one of these abominable modern words which the Greek language in the good times didn't know but which is helpful for simple, superficial, colloquial understanding: religious fanaticism. Religious fanaticism. It is this kind of waspishness with which the poet is concerned in our play, not that of the *dēmos*. The waspishness of the *dēmos* is partly useful and partly incurable. He is not even concerned with the waspishness of the demagogues. Remember, Cleon is called twice and never comes. The poet wants to emphasize it as strongly as possible: It is not Cleon and this kind of evil with which I'm concerned in this play. The waspishness of Philocleon is curable, it seems, in a simple way: if he has the right kind of son who will beat him. But it is curable only to some extent. Philocleon is prevailed upon to stay away from the law court, where he could do massive mischief, but he needs some more or less vicious substitute for the supreme viciousness of condemning people at all costs, which is the son. And there are three such substitutes suggested. First, playing with condemning, pretending to condemn, as the scene with the dog. But that of course doesn't cure the disease; it only substitutes harmless objects for the objects where he could do harm. The second one is refinement and elegant society, and that is a failure, a complete one—well, because he's much too crude. And that is the central point. That doesn't work. That would be the best, although you must not forget that the poet, with proper poetic license of . . . presents this refinement in a grotesque form, you know, as a kind of very funny scene—what kind of coat he wears, what kind of shoes—the old man has never heard that such things exist—and the kind of conversation you make at a cocktail party and so on and so on. That is very funny, and that is naturally legitimately overdone. But then there is this third point which works, and that is parody of the new art, something which Aristophanes himself does all the time, especially in connection with the tragedy of Euripides.

Now these substitutes are supplied, and especially the last, by comedy; and therefore that Bdelycleon is called, calls himself in a way a comic poet in this verse to which I have referred (660 to 661), is perfectly correct. The comedy mitigates the inevitable evils of the *polis* and the law. Therefore, because it mitigates evils which are felt more or less by every sane human being, the comedy is welcome. But the basis of comedy, prosaic wisdom—or to use a still harsher term, astronomy, understanding of the basis of everything—is not welcome. You see, Socrates is interested in the truth, finds it out, and so<sup>103</sup> that<sup>104</sup> is not welcome. I mean, only a very special individual like Strepsiades has a momentary interest in it, because he misconstrues the meaning of the whole. He thinks he can get out of his debts. But what the poet does—who knows what Socrates does, but<sup>105</sup> puts it to a good human use, mitigating the evils, inevitable evils of society, that is welcome.

The son fails in his attempt to transform his father into a man of elegant society. Only vulgar pleasures would attract this old guy. Perhaps we can say, because there are some allusions to that, that the son made the mistake of Aristophanes, whose *Clouds* were rejected by the judges, who was deserted by the Athenians, as is indicated in verse 1291. Yet the malicious wit of comedy is effective as a substitute and a cure for the waspishness in question. That, I think, is what he means to say in the *Wasps*. And so<sup>106</sup> that is clear, I think, the . . . The theme, or a theme of great importance in the three plays we have discussed, is the beating of the father; and the status is entirely different in the three plays because here we have, as I say, a legitimate beating, whereas in the two other cases it's either forbidden or leads to . . .

Now we have then to turn rather abruptly to Plato, the *Apology* and the *Crito*. On the surface—I mean, when we begin to read that,<sup>107</sup> we don't find directly these themes, because the *Apology*, as you know, is a defense of Socrates against the charge; and the *Crito* is a discussion between Socrates and, I don't say his most intimate friend but his oldest friend as to whether he should escape from prison or should stick it out. But the connection is there to Aristophanes, to the problem of Aristophanes. Why does Socrates accept the verdict of the city of Athens, which he regards as unjust? You know, when he was condemned a very sentimental young friend of his, Apollodorus, said: How terrible that they have condemned you to death unjustly. And then Socrates, for once smiling, laughing, said: Would you have preferred it that I be condemned justly?<sup>xxii</sup> And so Socrates was condemned unjustly—that's at least the claim, and he nevertheless accepts the punishment. On what grounds? I'm speaking of the most superficial aspect. One honors father and mother, but the honor owed to the *polis* is much greater than the honor owed to father and mother. So that is the principle, and we must see how this is related to rational morality in the case of Socrates. I'm sure that this problem is sufficiently articulated in these two works of Plato we're going to read, although there are others which are very pertinent, but we cannot read too much. We cannot read more than these two relatively short writings.<sup>108</sup>

I have two or three more minutes.<sup>109</sup> If there is someone who has a very clear and simple question, I'm willing to discuss it. Mr. Faulkner?

**Mr. Faulkner:** . . . some of us have seen the production at the Goodman Theater<sup>xxiii</sup> of *Hippolytus*, Euripides's *Hippolytus*, and there it becomes very clear that Aphrodite or Love is the target of Euripides. Is this bound up?

**LS:** Yes. Well, that was the accusation made in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, that Euripides is a women-hater. Ya? A women-hater. And the women of Athens persecute him but he, in contradistinction to Socrates, can save himself. Yes. But that, I think, doesn't go to the root.<sup>110</sup> You find in the *Frogs*, there you find a clear opposition between Euripidean tragedy, the modern tragedy, and Aeschylus's tragedy, the old tragedy, but both regarding content and form. Ya, but<sup>111</sup> what Aristophanes thought about it remains ambiguous, because the judge there, the god Dionysus, can't decide it because some things are good in Aeschylus and other things are good in Euripides in both respects. And the decision is made on purely political grounds: Who has the sound view regarding Alcibiades? And that is Aeschylus. Ya? So the utmost one could say is this: Aeschylus is given an edge because of his political judgment, and perhaps the poet implies that [the fact that] Aeschylus had better political judgment is not unconnected with the character of his tragedy. That's the utmost one can say.<sup>112</sup> Yes, but Euripides belongs to Socrates, ya? And superficially, that settles it. He's a newfangled man and Aristophanes is an old reactionary. But that is not sufficient, because we have seen Meton, the other Socrates, the astronomer. He's thrown out by Peisthetaerus, but only because the *polis* cannot stand him, not because he himself does not love him, as he said. Ya? That is difficult to say. I think, on the basis of what I know, I would say Aristophanes regarded Sophocles as the greatest of the three, and therefore he is so—there are two verses on Sophocles in the *Frogs* of utmost beauty, which precisely in this shocking, parodizing context stand out as the greatest compliment one could pay to a man.<sup>xxiv</sup> So

<sup>xxii</sup> Xenophon, *Apology* 28.

<sup>xxiii</sup> In downtown Chicago.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Aristophanes, *Frogs*, ll. 78-82, 786-794.

that I think it cannot be—well, no one praises Aphrodite more than Aristophanes. That cannot be the difference. That needs a long study; it cannot be answered in a few minutes. So next time we will hear . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted “this is—.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “This—.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “in order—we must—.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “we can—.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “of the Just Speech—.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “that is exactly—I would—if you—.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “from the—.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “, which.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “. Plato—.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “Eros is—.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “—in the—from Plato’s *Republic*—.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “—you know, or.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “Vertically.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “was sure—.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “what he says in the place—.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “it.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “This simple—.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “the same—I mean.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “Then you had to have—I mean,.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “whether.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “but that was not—.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “to—.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “or not—.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “was more in—.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “Secondly, I think—.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “you know”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “by destroying.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “the just is—well, think of—.”

<sup>30</sup> Changed from “I think one can say that all the great writers to—whom we have—to the extent—whatever the—the word democracy can mean something—.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “here.”

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “for the cure—.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “And when—.”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted “more.”

<sup>35</sup> Deleted “the comedy is—.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “there is—.”

<sup>37</sup> Deleted “When, I mean—.”

<sup>38</sup> Deleted “is—.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “obeys—.”

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “by.”

<sup>41</sup> Deleted “the more—.”

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “we—.”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “if you.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “And—.”

<sup>45</sup> Deleted “that it is.”

<sup>46</sup> Deleted “—that is.”

<sup>47</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>48</sup> Deleted “is.”

<sup>49</sup> Moved “French.”

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- 50 Deleted "one."  
 51 Deleted "say—."  
 52 Deleted "They're corrupted—."  
 53 Deleted "The point that you—."  
 54 Deleted "they're not—."  
 55 Deleted ", what I can't—."  
 56 Deleted "That—."  
 57 Deleted "but, I mean, the problem—."  
 58 Deleted "you cannot call this—."  
 59 Deleted "hear—."  
 60 Deleted "if this would be—that is—."  
 61 Deleted "that they are—have the—."  
 62 Deleted "these massive—."  
 63 Deleted "what."  
 64 Deleted "what makes it—."  
 65 Deleted "none of the two chief characters appears—."  
 66 Deleted "is."  
 67 Deleted "it is—."  
 68 Deleted "implies—."  
 69 Deleted "in Socrates—."  
 70 Deleted "just—."  
 71 Deleted "and which."  
 72 Deleted "to side—."  
 73 Deleted "Here we have—."  
 74 Deleted "That is—."  
 75 Deleted "Philocleon—."  
 76 Deleted "the god-like—."  
 77 Deleted "He knows that—."  
 78 Deleted "In other words—yes, 'Don't call me'—yes,."  
 79 Deleted "he takes it—."  
 80 Deleted "He does not—you know,."  
 81 Deleted "that."  
 82 Deleted "Why—."  
 83 Deleted "in—."  
 84 Deleted "his."  
 85 Deleted "as he believed—."  
 86 Deleted "which is—."  
 87 Deleted "—but he proves—."  
 88 Deleted "of humdrum Athenian citizens—no, of true-born (I'm sorry, I can't read my handwriting),."  
 89 Deleted "s."  
 90 Deleted "altogether unreasonable—."  
 91 Deleted "in—you see, so they—these men—."  
 92 Deleted "that is."  
 93 Deleted "Yes, but, then, all right.."  
 94 Deleted "and—."  
 95 Deleted "of Bdelycleon—."  
 96 Deleted "and."  
 97 Deleted "a mad father—."  
 98 Deleted "there."  
 99 Moved "everything."  
 100 Deleted "That—."  
 101 Deleted "—yes."  
 102 Deleted ", I'm sorry—."  
 103 Deleted "and."  
 104 Deleted "is—."  
 105 Deleted "does something—."

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<sup>106</sup> Deleted “we have seen—and that also—.”

<sup>107</sup> Deleted “we will not find directly these themes—.”

<sup>108</sup> Deleted “Is there—I mean,.next time, Mr. Strickland will read the paper, and Mr. Packard will hand it in, Ya?”

<sup>109</sup> Deleted “if you want to,.”

<sup>110</sup> Deleted “One would have—.”

<sup>111</sup> Deleted “what Euripides—.”

<sup>112</sup> Deleted “Because—.”

## Session 9: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —all the important points, but I’m not quite clear whether I understood you.<sup>i</sup> You stated first that the defense is strikingly inadequate, and then you tried to show from what point of view it would not be inadequate. Now let me state my difficulty in the form of an objection. Could one not argue this way: Socrates does not refute the charge of impiety because he regarded it as absurd. Of course he believed in the gods of the city. I mean, that is suggested, for example, in the oracle of Apollo. He defers to Apollo. As for the formula of the accusation, at which Socrates pokes fun and which he refutes very easily,<sup>1</sup> what Meletus had probably had in mind was that he knew something of Socrates’s reference to the daemonic thing in him, the *daimonion*. And that is the formula which he used. He only says Socrates introduces new *daimonia*, the plural. Well, if there is a *daimonion* of Socrates, there may be other such things, and therefore he’s justified in refusing the plural. You know? But to come back to the main point: Could Socrates not have been a simply orthodox Athenian, and he regarded the charge as preposterous and ridiculous and therefore ridiculed it and took it lightly? What would you say to such a consideration?

**Student:** That’s plausible, but I don’t see how we can infer that from his silence.

**LS:** Well,<sup>2</sup> you referred frequently to Xenophon, to Xenophon’s discussion. What did you have in mind in Xenophon?

**Same Student:** Well, both the *Apology* and the *Memorabilia*.

**LS:** Now let us take the simpler presentation in the first chapter of the *Memorabilia*. Socrates sacrificed all the time, at all proper times at home and the public altars.<sup>ii</sup> So?<sup>3</sup> Why does Plato’s Socrates not refer to that? Is this not a sufficient proof of orthodoxy, if someone fulfills all the prescribed rites?

**Same Student:** The argument I was making is that he could have.

**LS:** But why did he not do it? I mean, that would seem to be a very strong argument. By what right can they say of Socrates he doesn’t believe in the gods of the city, when he sacrifices to them?

**Same Student:** Well, perhaps he didn’t want the jury to believe that he simply believed in the city’s gods.

**LS:** Yes, but then he becomes guilty of the crime. I think if one reads Xenophon—these four pages, not much more, surely—one sees the reason. You see the Greek word of the charge: “Socrates does not believe in the gods.” The word is *nomizein*: *nomizein*, which is derivative from *nomos*. [LS writes on the blackboard] That is the infinitive, *nomizein*, and that is the derivative from *nomos*. And this does not necessarily mean “believe”; it means also “to accept,

<sup>i</sup> Strauss responds to a student’s paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

<sup>ii</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1. 1.2.

to cherish.” All right, so one can say—what would be a good word in English indifferent to the distinction between intellectual belief and the practicing of proper things connected with it? I do not know.

**Same Student:** Cultivate? Worship?

**LS:** Ya, let us say worship. Let us say worship. Socrates could prove his worshipping the gods very easily, but what is the difficulty of such a proof? What is the difficulty? If one proves that Socrates worships the gods properly, does it prove that he believes that the gods exist? Therefore the accusation was—at least Socrates’s interpretation of the accusation—that Socrates did not believe that the gods exist. And the worshipping of the gods is no proof. Xenophon therefore also goes over to other things, ya, to other arguments, and in conclusion of the arguments he says: Well, it is not surprising that these things which I, Xenophon, have mentioned escaped the jury, but now I appeal to a fact which everyone knows, namely, that Socrates did not perjure himself in a crucial case, the case of the trial of the generals after the battle of Arginusae.<sup>iii</sup> That according to Xenophon is the only notorious fact about Socrates’s piety. The fact that he worshiped or did not worship was not so commonly known,<sup>4</sup> but the only thing which was commonly known was that Socrates fulfilled his sworn duty, and to fulfill one’s sworn duty means of course to obey the gods. Now that is obviously not proof of piety in particular. It could also be a proof of simple law-abidingness. So Xenophon himself, because . . . carefully shows that there was no notoriety of Socrates’s orthodoxy on which he could depend. That had to be the case. And that must be the background of your argument. And on this basis, if we turn therefore to the argument of the *Apology*, we immediately reach the conclusion that Socrates did not refute the charge, and a charge which was not far-fetched. Now why did he not do it? There are only two possibilities: he did not *wish* to refute it—and that means, in plain English, he wanted to commit suicide—or he *could not* refute it. Ya? And this leads to further questions.

Now we will take up these points coherently immediately after a brief reference to Mr. Haight’s paper, which refers to what we have said on former occasions on Aristophanes, and especially on the *Birds*. Ya, well,<sup>5</sup> I will turn to certain details you will make, and surely the decision, as I have said more than once, depends really on individual passages. Ya? We have to come down to facts, to details. And Mr. Haight is not convinced in any way by my interpretation. This is of course perfectly all right, but I am not quite certain whether there is not a bit more than a simple quiet feeling that my arguments are no good, whether there is not a certain—well, animosity would be much too strong an expression, but something between perfect indifference and animosity behind this. I do not know.

**Mr. Haight:** There is not.

**LS:** No? Good. That settles it. According to all rules of psychology, that settles it. [Laughter] Now then I’ll turn to a few points. Now let me make only one crucial point. Your interpretation and your objections are based not only on specific passages—that is impossible; they are also based on a certain premise, hypothesis, however you call it. And that is: What is a comedy? You

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<sup>iii</sup> *Memorabilia* 1. 1.17-19.



make constant use of that. One example refers to Abbott and Costello,<sup>iv</sup> against which I have absolutely nothing, but that is only an indication of the fact that you have a certain broad understanding of comedy which is not altogether derived from Aristophanes. That is exactly the point where we differ, the fundamental point, and that is whether you have given sufficient thought to what a comedy is and especially regarding Aristophanean comedy.

Now I turn to a few formulations of yours. If I understand it correctly, you say the official interpretation of the *Birds* rests on two major propositions—"official" in quotes, and "official" is my interpretation. [Laughter] Why I receive this signal honor [laughter] I do not know, because "official"<sup>6</sup> could be applied to some extent to something which is generally accepted. Ya?

**Mr. Haight:** I put it in quotes because it didn't quite seem to fit, but I used the word because I couldn't think of another. [Laughter]

**LS:** I see. Okay. You mean official as far as this classroom is concerned. Okay. Good. So that is clear. It would have been simpler if you had said, "official interpretation as far as Mr. Strauss is concerned." Now they are, first, that the *Birds* is a part of a deliberate and conscious attempt of Aristophanes to present through his plays a description of the ideal *polis*. That is not quite correct. I mean, that could create the impression as if I meant that Aristophanes's plays as a whole serve the purpose of describing an ideal *polis*. The utmost one could say is that there are three plays of Aristophanes which deal in different ways with a *polis* radically different from any actually known, and these are the *Birds*, the *Assembly of Women*, and *Plutus*. But I would never say that this is a formula which applies to all Aristophanean comedies. The possibility of this subject surely belongs to the Aristophanean comedy, but it is not its essence.<sup>7</sup> Second, that Aristophanes therefore inserted several scenes in the *Birds* whose purpose is to make statements about the ideal *polis*, its nature, and the elements it would and would not contain. "Therefore" I would have to delete: the *Birds* is a representation of a city which never existed and never will exist, and which we may loosely call an ideal *polis*. Therefore of course he inserted into it many scenes which are to make clear the character of that *polis*, because no one, I think, can deny that in the *Birds* a *polis* is founded which doesn't exist anywhere, and which is "quote ideal unquote" to the extent that it is founded by people dissatisfied with the actual city and looking for a satisfying city or satisfactory city. And they do that. I mean,<sup>8</sup> the descriptions are there. They want to go to a city in which they can live pleasantly, in which there is no busybody-ness of any kind, and so on and so on. That is true.

Now then you give a few points here. Ya. For example, you are dissatisfied with what I say about the connection between the *Birds* and the *Clouds*. And I refer to the point that the perfect *polis* of the *Birds* is called Cloud-Cuckoo-land. And the clouds play a great role in the *Clouds*, as we know. Now the second point was the character of a father-beater appears in both plays, and to that you say the first two of these points strike you as very minor, for the rest are nothing more than verbal coincidence. Well, I would say that is more than verbal, because the clouds are a massive reality in the *Clouds* and they also are a very massive reality in the *Birds*. And that Socrates is aloft at the beginning of the *Clouds* when he appears, and it has very much to do with that, and that his realm is somehow also not on earth but in the air—he is in the clouds, as we get

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<sup>iv</sup> Abbott and Costello, an America comic duo active in the 1940s and 50s. They made dozens of films and had their own television program in the 1950s.

by the name—shows that this is more than verbal. That the father-beater should be verbal I can hardly believe, because that is a very definite phenomenon which plays a very great role in the *Clouds* and plays a certain role, at any rate, also in the *Birds*. And that this is a very great problem, the father-beater, is clear once you think about it, because the question of father-beating is identical with the question of the difference between reasonable authority and nonreasonable authority, the implication being that the father, as father, especially of a grown-up son, is not necessarily wiser than the son,<sup>9</sup> whereas the only rational authority is that of the wise compared with the unwise.

Then the point at which you are most explicit: there is a parallel between Socrates of the *Clouds* and Meton in the *Birds*, since both are astronomers, and this you flatly deny.<sup>10</sup> You say Meton is presented as a town planner. Any reference to Socrates as a town planner in the *Clouds* is minor, if it exists at all. To my knowledge, it doesn't exist at all. So it turns only around the question: Is Meton only a town planner in the *Birds*? And I think that can be refuted by a simple reference to a passage, in verse 995 (I don't have the edition here) when Meton comes up and Peisthetaerus asks him, he says: "I wish to geometrize the air."<sup>v</sup> That's the first verse. *Geōmetrēsai*, the Greek word *geōmetrēsai* means to measure the earth, and then naturally, derivatively, to geometrize, to be a geometer regarding the air. The town-planning is incidental to that, or consequential, but the primary thing is his geometrizing the air, which reminds very much<sup>11</sup> [of] what Socrates is doing when he walks on the air in order to study the other things. Furthermore, you say there is no explicit reference to Meton the astronomer, but when in the second speech of Meton he says, replying to Peisthetaerus's question of who he is—Who am I?—he says: "Meton, who is known by Greece and by Colonus."<sup>vi</sup> So in other words, he is very well known, and therefore there is no special need for explicitly speaking of the astronomy. Moreover, a little bit later, verse 1009, after Meton had spoken of what he can do, Peisthetaerus breaks out into the words: "That man is a Thales."<sup>vii</sup> The same expression is applied to Socrates by Strepsiades.<sup>viii</sup> Thales is *the* figure, as some people today say of Einstein and Newton. Everyone knows that. He may not understand a single thing of what it is about, but that it has something to do with the stars was well known, because there was this famous story about Thales's lack of intelligence. You know it, Mr. Reinken, the stupidity of astronomers.

**Mr. Reinken:**<sup>ix</sup> Oh, he felt that philosophers . . . that he saw that it was a good harvest, bought a whole—<sup>x</sup>

<sup>v</sup> *Birds*, line 995. Strauss's translation.

<sup>vi</sup> *Birds*, ll. 997-998. Strauss's translation.

<sup>vii</sup> *Birds*, line 1009. Strauss's translation.

<sup>viii</sup> *Clouds*, line 180: "Why, then, are we amazed at that Thales?" (*ti dēt' ekeinon ton Thalēn thaumazomen*).

<sup>ix</sup> Donald Reinken served as the reader in many of Strauss's courses. Evidently he was sitting in on this session.

<sup>x</sup> Mr. Reinken's unfinished reference is to the anecdote that Thales, predicting a good harvest based on weather patterns, bought all the olive presses in Miletus and resold them later at a higher price. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.4.5 (1259a) and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 1.26.

**LS:** Yes, that was already his reply. But the original thing for which he was famous: looking at the stars, he fell into a ditch.<sup>xi</sup> So that is a perfectly clear popular notion of what an astronomer is. Everyone knew what a Thales is. So<sup>12</sup> on the contrary, I think one can prove<sup>13</sup> that the opposite is true, that Meton is the astronomer<sup>14</sup> in this very verse.

**Mr. Haight:** Mr. Strauss?

**LS:** Yes?

**Mr. Haight:** Further on in my paper I make another reference to Meton, in which I make another point about the question of his being an astronomer, the point being that if Aristophanes had directly and clearly wished to present him as an astronomer, it would have been quite simple. Meton perhaps could have wished to live in Cloud-Cuckoo-land in order to be closer to the stars and so observe them better. He could have been presented very explicitly and very clearly as an astronomer, yet he was not.

**LS:** But the question is: Were there not good reasons for *not* overstressing that? Because the idea of Meton is, he wants to immigrate to that new city; and in order to immigrate to that new city he has to prove his usefulness to that city, and therefore the emphasis on what he can do regarding town-planning. That, I think, only confirms my argument: that an astronomer, a stargazer is as such useless to the city is the accepted view. It requires already some cleverness to say he is useful for the following reasons, namely, there are some times in war—you're going to fight tomorrow, everything is fine, and then there is an eclipse of the moon and all your soldiers get frightened. That's an ominous day: not tomorrow. And then what do you do, if you are really a good and enlightened general? You call your soldiers together and<sup>15</sup> give them a very simple lecture, by drawing figures in the sand and show them that an eclipse of the moon is absolutely nothing terrible and ominous but it happens mechanically under these and these conditions.<sup>16</sup> [There] was a long argument on this subject at the beginning of Cicero's book on the *Republic*, and that goes back to the whole story.<sup>xii</sup> Ya, but this is already a ticklish thing, because here you have a definite, let us say, the little . . . to the effect that this is not good to pry into the secrets of the gods. And a great Greek general in Sicily, as you know, Nicias, was pious enough not to do that and to trust the omens.<sup>xiii</sup> So<sup>17</sup> in other words, he could prove his utility not by being an astronomer and therefore valuable strategically. He could prove it only by something so innocuous, so neutral, as town planning.

You say Peisthetaerus and Euelpides also study nature, namely, the crow and the jay, in order to find the ideal city. Ya, well, that is in itself not a study of nature. On the contrary, it is the opposite: it is following the birds as omens, something which has very little to do with that. But if you insist on that formula, I would say there is an element of truth in it, which I believe I have

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<sup>xi</sup> Plato, *Theatetus* 174a; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 1.34.

<sup>xii</sup> Cicero, *De Re Publica* 1.16 (§25). Cicero relates the story that Pericles instructed the Athenians that the eclipse was a natural occurrence and therefore not something to be feared as inauspicious. He also claims that Pericles learned this truth from Anaxagoras but that it was Thales who first discovered the natural pattern of eclipses. See also Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.28 and 4.52.1 for the natural pattern.

<sup>xiii</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 7.50.4. The eclipse here is lunar rather than solar.

explained, namely, to the extent to which Peisthetaerus at any rate is seeking a city according to nature. Therefore the derivation of *polis* from *polos*, and so on.

Yes, then you bring an argument which I really don't see at all. There is one further objection: the idea that Aristophanes intended the *Clouds* and the *Birds* to form connected parts of a presentation of his political thoughts. Ya, I mean, I don't want to insist on that formulation. I only said they are connected. Now what's your proof? That they were presented nine years apart. Between these two dates of the *Clouds* and the *Birds*, Aristophanes must have written at least a dozen other plays. Surely he may, for all we know, but what does this mean? What does this mean? Maybe these lost plays would all confirm fifty times what I've said. So we can't say any more. Maybe they wouldn't. We don't know. But is this the only case in which a great man takes up a theme, leaves it dormant for a certain time for one reason or the other because he is attracted by some other themes, and then takes it up again? Not the slightest difficulty.

Now<sup>18</sup> you say I do not believe that there is any real significance to the fact that Meton is referred to by name, for the practice of mocking prominent Athenians by name appears in all of Aristophanes's plays. Sure. But why is Meton mentioned by name, and why is the sycophant not mentioned by name? Why are only the poet and only the astronomer mentioned by name? That question remains, absolutely.

**Mr. Haight:** There is a point in there I'd like to bring up, if you don't mind, and that is that if Aristophanes intended to use Meton and Cinesias to make general statements about poets as a group and astronomers as a group, it seems to be more reasonable that he would have used a nameless astronomer or a nameless poet, in order that they might better represent astronomers as a class and poets as a class rather than directing it to any particular one.

**LS:** Yes. But<sup>19</sup> we have forgotten the *parabasis*, where it says—it so happens that Aristophanes, in two different scenes, in the founding scene and in the scene of the potential immigrants, uses a number of anonymous people; and in each case one individual is mentioned by name. And in the first case it is Meton, and in the second case it is the poet Cinesias. We have to explain that. We have to explain that because,<sup>20</sup> I mean, if you would say astronomers, there was Meton; but sycophants<sup>21</sup>, there was a great harvest of sycophants and of such other people. That still would have to be explained.

There is one point where you have some right and where I may have been a little too brief, and that concerns the passage on page 48 of your translation—that's verse<sup>22</sup> 1072, following—where you make this remark. I'll read it as you say:

“The lines of the Chorus which go, ‘Listen to the City’s notice, specially proclaimed to-day;/Sirs, Diagoras the Melian whosoever of you slay,/Shall receive, reward, one talent; and another we’ll bestow/If you slay some ancient tyrant, dead and buried long ago.’<sup>xiv</sup> These lines supposedly imply that heresy and tyranny are not allowed in the ideal city. But first, these lines do not apply to Cloud-Cuckoo-land; they apply to Athens. And second, at least the last two lines are intended as a joke.”

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<sup>xiv</sup> *The Birds*, ll.1072-1075.

Now that is perfectly true. This is a quotation which the Chorus makes, and a quotation, we can safely say, literal or not literal, of what an Athenian proclamation was. But still they adopt it. They adopt it, and<sup>23</sup> one can show that they apply [it], properly modified, to the ideal city. If the ideal city of the Birds, as I have tried to show, is a universal democracy, the prohibition against tyranny applies to it, naturally. The second point, that they must have gods and cannot tolerate an atheist like Diagoras the Melian, is proven by the play as a whole. The birds are the gods. And therefore<sup>24</sup> that is correct, what you say at this point.

But you must also take a somewhat broader view, and that refers also to a remark which you make later. The city of the birds differs radically from any city we know. It still is a city. Certain basic characteristics—for example, the difference between rulers and ruled, that there are some formal sort of laws—are the same. And therefore there is a kind of kinship to the city, a kinship which shows itself also more subtly and more indirectly by the differences. You discover the true city of the Birds only by starting from the deficiencies of the city which you empirically know. You say that if the notice is about Athenian heretics and tyrants—this one which I quoted—how then could it apply to Cloud-Cuckoo-land? Answer: because the ideal *polis* arises out of a modification of the actual *polis* and therefore, modified, these things live on in the perfect city. What you say is perfectly true, that Aristophanes ridicules here as well as in *The Wasps*, for example, the extreme fear of Athenians of old tyrants. Ya? That's perfectly true. But that<sup>25</sup> does not exclude what I said.<sup>26</sup> He excludes the extreme apprehension of the Athenians regarding tyrants, although he proved to be not such an extreme reactionary, as you know, a little bit later, but that was Aristophanes's error. But the main point is that this prohibition against tyranny, as distinguished from the perhaps foolish apprehension, is of the essence of the democracy. And any regime has such prohibitions against alternatives; that's the meaning of a constitution.

Ya, well, I cannot possibly go into all the points because we really don't have the time, and let us leave it at this amiable or amicable agreement. Mr. Haight does not believe that the interpretation of Aristophanes which I suggested is correct. That is perfectly good and is even very healthy for me, and as well as for others who perhaps<sup>27</sup> do not believe that it is so entirely wrong, what I said.<sup>28</sup> Such questions cannot be settled in a seminar, and still less in a very cursory reading as we have now, but I must only warn you of one point where I believe I'm correct, and that has nothing to do with any details. One cannot leave it in any case at the current categories, as people call it—in this case, for example, comedy. What a comedy is, and especially what in our case, what an Aristophanean comedy is, is to begin with an absolute riddle. And the historical information we have about its origin and things to which you refer do not yet prove that Aristophanes's comedy is the same as what the comedy originally meant in the Athenian cult. The relation with this will always be there, but not more. I gave a lecture of I believe a half an hour, if not more, in your absence and it would be—

**Mr. Haight:** An absence which I regret.

**LS:** Yes, and so do I. We all regret it very much. But I cannot, for simple reasons of time and consideration of your fellow students, repeat it. But<sup>29</sup> I mean, I'm sure you know one or the other who can [repeat it], but the main point dealt with is this question: How much have you given free thought, quiet thought, unbiased thought to the question of what the comedy is? And that, I think,

affects the interpretation of every particular passage. So I must leave it there, then. And we must turn to the *Apology*, unless you have a very specific point which can be dealt with briefly.

**Mr. Haight:** I'm afraid I don't, and since it seems to me quite reasonable to—after all, you have a class to teach and only so long in which to teach it. I didn't really expect you to go over my paper in class.

**LS:** Well, no. Yes, but that I wanted to do, because I think the subject is of general interest. I mean, not necessarily that all the points you made had to be considered under all circumstances, but the thing at issue between us is not merely Mr. Haight versus me, it is a general issue, and the general issue is whether we can go on trusting the usual conventional and, in the best case, traditional notions of comedy. Just the same would apply to tragedy. I mean, in the case of tragedy we have these long disquisitions of Aristotle in the *Poetics*, which<sup>30</sup> everyone of sense will treat with the greatest respect, but it is still an absolutely open question of course whether the tragedy as meant by Sophocles, for example, or Euripides is the same as what Aristotle understood by it. That is an open question. It is also a very open question whether Plato's doctrine of tragedy is the same as Aristotle's. It is only much harder to answer, because Plato didn't deign to write a treatise on tragedy. In the case of comedy, we are worse off because we have still less about it<sup>31</sup> in Aristotle and in Plato than about tragedy.

So now let us then turn to the *Apology of Socrates*. I remind you of one point which you know from the *Clouds* and which is manifest and where there can be no disagreement. In the *Clouds* Socrates comes to sight as an astronomer and a teacher of rhetoric. That is a matter of public knowledge in Athens. Now we are about twenty years later, and Socrates comes again, appears again on the stage, but this time as an accused man.<sup>32</sup> I mean, that is not irrelevant. You must take<sup>33</sup> an intelligent Athenian, who is not what now would be called a culture-vulture by some people, but an intelligent man with his wits about him. He has seen Aristophanes's comedy and now he sees Socrates again, this time not in a mask, but himself. What will he hear?

Now in the beginning, in the proemium—because that is of course a speech properly elaborated, properly built up, and begins with an introduction, with a proemium—the main assertion, as has become clear from the paper, is the accusers have lied and Socrates will say the truth. He says even “the whole truth.” He says “the whole truth.”<sup>xv34</sup> That is a point. Socrates explicitly says that he will say the whole truth, and the accusers have said nothing but lies. But that is qualified, what he says about the accusers right at the beginning, in the first or second sentence, where he says: “They have said, so to speak, nothing true,”<sup>xvi</sup> meaning it is not literally true. They have said certain things which are true. Now what does this qualification, [“so to speak”], in itself mean? It is absolutely impossible to say something which does not contain an element of truth. For example, if you say: I have seen Mr. X killing Mr. Y, and Mr. Y is alive and Mr. X was at that time in an entirely different town, it is a simple lie, yet Mr. X is and Mr. Y is.<sup>35</sup> Every truth is prior. Every lie is based on some preceding truth. That is true.

But this is not quite what Socrates means, because immediately afterwards he says that he has fallen to wondering most about one thing of the many things [about] which they have lied. You

<sup>xv</sup> Plato, *Apology* 17b (*pasan tēn alētheian*).

<sup>xvi</sup> *Apology* 17b. Strauss's translation.

know, not all things they said were lies. And a little bit later, in 17b7, he says: “These men, as I assert, have said hardly anything or nothing true.”<sup>xvii</sup> He does not say that everything is a lie, but that is not terribly important. The biggest lie, he says, was that they said Socrates was a clever speaker, because he will easily refute them now. A clever speaker is a speaker who gets an acquittal under the worst circumstances, and Socrates knows he will be condemned. So that will be refuted. But then<sup>36</sup> he interprets that a bit and says: “Their biggest lie was that I am a clever speaker, unless they mean that I say the truth. If a clever speaker is a man who says the truth, then I am a clever speaker,” because he will indeed say the whole truth. He disclaims the use of rhetorical art, but he will speak as he used to speak<sup>37</sup> [in] the marketplace and in other places. Socrates,<sup>38</sup> [in] the marketplace, talking to others, a citizen, an ordinary citizen, has nothing to do with the art of rhetoric, and especially that art which he would need now: the art of forensic rhetoric. I mean, is the term forensic rhetoric known to you? Because sometimes certain very simple expressions are unknown. The Greeks—Aristotle, for example—make the distinction[s] of rhetoric into three kinds: forensic rhetoric, dealing with right and wrong, used before law courts; deliberative rhetoric, dealing with the expedient and inexpedient, used in political assemblies; and epideictic rhetoric, “or show, or display” rhetoric, dealing with the beautiful and ugly, or noble and base, used for show’s sake or edification’s sake.

So Socrates<sup>39</sup> does not possess the art of forensic rhetoric. Why? And he proves that to them.<sup>40</sup> I mean, prior to the proof by deed, that he will be condemned,<sup>41</sup> he proves it right at the beginning. If you will turn to 17d: “For now”—do you have it? “Now I have ascended for the first time,” or “come up to the law court, seventy years old, and I am in the position of a stranger with regard to the way of speaking here employed.”<sup>xviii</sup> Do you have that? He does not possess the art of forensic rhetoric because he has never been accused. Because he has never been accused. That is of course not a good proof, because there were many teachers of rhetoric who were never accused. At the end of this proemium<sup>42</sup> he makes this remark and he states as following: they should watch not whether he is an artful speaker, but whether he says just things or not; for this is the virtue of the judge, namely, to see whether the defendant speaks just things or not, but the virtue of the speaker is to say the truth.<sup>xix</sup> But this [latter] virtue Socrates possesses. You see the tacit identification of just and true, which is striking and noticeable, which we must keep in mind.

Socrates claims, to repeat the main point, that he will say the whole truth in this speech; and if he does not say the whole truth, he just lies. That’s a terrible dilemma for us. If he would say: I say only that part of the truth which you understand, that would be simple. But he says he’s going to say the whole truth. That’s great—I mean, that’s a very great moral question, which could not with propriety be discussed under the occasion. But Socrates discussed it earlier—Plato’s Socrates, I mean—discussed it earlier on a proper occasion, and this is in the dialogue *Gorgias*, because in the *Gorgias* a young man called Callicles says to Socrates: If you continue to lead the life you do, you will be completely powerless once you are accused. You can’t defend yourself. You can’t defend yourself, and therefore think of self-defense. Whereas Socrates says: I do not think of self-defense, of self-preservation. I think of other things.

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<sup>xvii</sup> *Apology* 17b. Again, Strauss’s (more literal) translation.

<sup>xviii</sup> Plato, *Apology* 17d. Strauss’s translation.

<sup>xix</sup> *Apology* 18a. The latter part of Strauss’s paraphrase is almost a literal translation.

Now what does he say? Callicles says—I read it superficially in the translation:

[Callicles:] It quite strikes me, Socrates, that you believe not one of these troubles [namely, accusation—LS] could befall you, as though you dwelt out of the way, and could never be dragged into a law court by some perhaps utterly paltry rascal. [It is at the bottom of 521c. To which Socrates replies—LS]:

[Socrates:] Then I’m a fool, Callicles, in truth, if I do not suppose that in this city anyone, whoever he was, might find himself, as luck would<sup>xx</sup> have it, in any sort of plight. [Pericles himself was accused—LS]

[Soc.:] Of one thing, however, I am sure—that if I am ever brought before the court and stand in any such danger as you mention, it will be some villain who brings me there, for no honest man would prosecute someone<sup>xxi</sup> who had done no wrong; and it would be no marvel if I were put to death. Would you like me to tell you my reason for expecting this? [You know, that is many years before the accusation—LS]

[Call.:] By all means.<sup>xxii</sup>

[Soc.:] I think I am one of few, not to say the only one, in Athens who attempts the true political art,<sup>xxiii</sup> and the only man of the present time who manages the affairs of the city:<sup>xxiv</sup> hence, as the speeches that I make from time to time are not aimed at gratification, but at what is best instead of what is most pleasant, and as I do not care to deal in “those pretty toys”<sup>xxv</sup> that you recommend, I shall have not a word to say at the bar. The same case that I made out to Polus [in the earlier part of the dialogue—LS] will apply to me; for I shall be like a doctor tried by a bench of children on a charge brought by a cook. Just consider what a friend someone like that would make at such a pass, if the accuser<sup>xxvi</sup> should speak against him thus: “Children, this fellow has done you all a great deal of mischief, and he destroys even the youngest of you by cutting and burning, and starves and chokes you to distraction, giving you nasty bitter draughts and forcing you to fast and thirst; not like me, who used to gorge you with abundance of nice things of every sort.” What do you suppose a doctor brought to this sad pass could say for himself? Or if he spoke the truth—“All this I did, my boys, for your health”—how great, think you, would be the outcry from such a bench as that?<sup>xxvii</sup>

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<sup>xx</sup> Lamb has “should.”

<sup>xxi</sup> Lamb has “a person.”

<sup>xxii</sup> Lamb has “Do, by all means.”

<sup>xxiii</sup> Lamb has “art of statesmanship.”

<sup>xxiv</sup> Lamb omits “the” and has “affairs of state.”

<sup>xxv</sup> Lamb has “these pretty toys.” This phrase is repeated from 486c, where Callicles quotes Euripides. The fragment (Nauck, fr. 188) is from *Antiope*. See *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. Augustus Nauck, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leipzig, Germany: B.G. Teubner, 1889), 416.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Lamb has “prosecutor.”

<sup>xxvii</sup> Plato, *Gorgias* 521c-522a.



**LS:** It's impossible to say—it's impossible to say the truth, and a part of that impossibility is the declaration that he will say the whole truth. He talks to little children. That is the position in which Socrates approaches his accusers.

Then Socrates begins with a distinction. He says this accusation which is now brought forth by this formal accusation is only the end of a long story. There was originally an accusation and original accusers, the first accusers, and these first accusers are much more dangerous than the present ones. Who are these first accusers? Who are they?

**Mr. Metzel:** Public opinion?

**LS:** Public opinion. Ya, they are nameless. Many, many [accusers]. But still, let us not leave it at what could be an abstraction. The folk mind of Athens, the public opinion: Where does it reside? Where does it reside, the public opinion, the first accusation? Where does it reside? Yes?

**Student:** He identifies Aristophanes implicitly—

**LS:** <sup>43</sup>Yes, but Aristophanes is perhaps a mouthpiece of them and the only proper name he can mention there; but Aristophanes acted as a mouthpiece, as Socrates makes clear. But who are the accusers<sup>44</sup> on whom Aristophanes relies? Who are they? I mean, public opinion, all right, but still let us be a bit more scientific. Where does it reside? How do you find out what the public opinion, say, on President—on Vice President Nixon is? That was a slip of the tongue. How do you find out?

**Student:** . . .

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** One asks someone, one observes.

**LS:** Yes, and I mean, you don't have millions there, but what do you do? I mean, you can talk to many people. Well, may I suggest a simple answer: public opinion, in this sense, resides in many Athenians, and if it is really simply the public opinion, I think one should even say the majority of Athenians. The majority of Athenians accused Socrates of something in the past. Where are these many, this majority, now?

**Student:** On the bench.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** On the bench. They are trying him.

**LS:** The first accusers are the others, sure. That is the joke. By characterizing the first accusers, he accused the others. But if you want to be a bit more scrupulous and pedantic, you say: Actually, it was the fathers of the present ones. But it amounts to the same thing. That is what they sucked in,<sup>45</sup> one can say, by their fathers' milk. Ya? I mean, when they were little children,

they were told by their fathers that he's such a wicked soul. So it amounts to the same thing. Ya? The former generation of Athenians or the present generation of Athenians,<sup>46</sup> the former majority or the present majority:<sup>47</sup> these are the first accusers. And Socrates uses a rhetorical trick which is quite remarkable, that he shows them in the mirror by asserting: That's not you. Ya? That's not you. But there is, of course, that.

Now what do they charge Socrates with?<sup>48</sup> There are various formulations. The first occurs in 18b6: "that there is some Socrates, a wise man, a worrier about the celestial things and someone who has sought out all things beneath the earth and who makes<sup>49</sup> the weaker speech the stronger speech."<sup>xxviii</sup> This is what they say. And this is something that in itself is an accusation. The last case is obvious: it means a teacher of rhetorical tricks. Ya? But why a worrier<sup>50</sup>—or thinker, you can also say—about the celestial things, the things aloft? Why this should be wicked we do not immediately understand. Therefore we would have to look up, and we find in Xenophon, for example, and even here some evidence that this was regarded as an impious thing. And the things beneath the earth,<sup>51</sup> [which] are not onions as Strepsiades thought, but Hades: life after death. He investigated that. Now there is another formulation a little bit later, when Aristophanes already is coming up. Now when<sup>52</sup> [Socrates] says, "And what is most irrational about it, that it is impossible to know and to name the names of these accusers unless he happens to be a comic poet,"<sup>xxix</sup> that is a mere accidental case that one of these accusers happened to be a comic poet who makes himself a mouthpiece of public opinion. But he's not the accuser.

Now what is the motive of these people? Why do they calumniate Socrates? Why do they say he's a wicked man? And he indicates this in the immediate sequel, where I stopped here: he refers to the envy. Why are they envious? Why are they envious? I mean, if someone says:<sup>53</sup> "This is this embezzler of public funds," ya? wrongly, the motive is not necessarily envy. He can hate him for other reasons: perhaps because he tried to embezzle and the other fellow prevented him, and so on. Why is it envy? Why is Socrates so sure that it's envy, a theme which recurs?

**Student:** Is it possible because he takes away the affection of their children?

**LS:** That is not unimportant.<sup>54</sup> In Xenophon that plays a great role. There's a very beautiful passage in Xenophon on this subject, but not here. It's more directly connected: wisdom. This wisdom is a devilish thing, if we exaggerate a bit. A devilish thing. That is of course something fantastic, to be a wise man. That has to do with his wisdom.

Now let us come to the formulation of the first accusation a little bit later, in 19b. Now Socrates formulates the accusation as if it were a formal accusation: "Socrates commits an unjust act and does superfluous things [superfluous things, also<sup>55</sup> he "goes beyond the line"—LS] by seeking what is beneath the earth as well as the heavenly things, and by making the weaker speech stronger and by teaching others these very same things."<sup>xxx</sup> You see now that the formula is stricter. In the first place, he adds: "He teaches others these things." We've run across that before. He teaches others these things. Socrates is a teacher. The second point is slightly more

<sup>xxviii</sup> Plato *Apology* 18b. Strauss's translation or paraphrase.

<sup>xxix</sup> *Apology* 18c-d. Strauss's translation or paraphrase.

<sup>xxx</sup> *Apology* 19b. Strauss's translation or paraphrase.

subtle, but it is this: that now the heavenly things are in the center. The greatest sin is the study of these heavenly things, and he teaches them. Astronomy. And now he proves<sup>56</sup> that this is really the view, not because Aristophanes invented it. Aristophanes is only the mouthpiece of that opinion, and he refers to the comedy of Aristophanes. Will you read this passage, please, whoever has it? “For this you see yourself in the comedy of Aristophanes.” Yes? “That some Socrates is there.” Do you have it?

**Reader:**<sup>xxx</sup>

And in the comedy of Aristophanes you saw yourself a man called Socrates swinging around in a basket and saying he walked on air, and sputtering a great deal of nonsense about matters of which I understand nothing at all. I do not mean to disparage that kind of knowledge if there is anyone who is wise about these matters. I trust Meletus may never be able to prosecute me for that.

**LS:** “For such a great”—ya, “for such a great charge.” Yes?

**Reader:**

But the truth is, Athenians, I have nothing to do with these matters, and almost all of you are yourselves my witnesses of this. I beg all of you who have ever heard me discussing, and they are many, to inform your neighbors and tell them if any of you have ever heard me discussing such matters at all. That will show you that the other common statements about me are as false as this one.<sup>57</sup>

**LS:** Yes, now let us stop here.<sup>58</sup> Well, I think we should translate more literally one point: “As witnesses for that, I exhibit the many of you:” *hymōn tous pollous*, “the many of you.” That should be brought out.

So Socrates<sup>59</sup> speaks then first in defense against the persecutors of his alleged wisdom. And he says the heavenly things, the things beneath the earth, rhetoric, he possesses nothing of this kind. But he does not despise it. He does not despise it. But how does he prove that he does not possess it? After all, a mere denial is never enough before a law court. Answer, slightly exaggerated: He never conversed with the many about these subjects. He never conversed with those who accused him of it about it, so<sup>60</sup> at least his doing these things is not notorious and cannot be notorious. Now that was the first point.<sup>61</sup> He has no knowledge of these things. And then one can say: Well, if he doesn’t know astronomy, for example, he surely cannot teach it. It’s refuted. But that is not what Socrates does. Let us read the scene. Yes? If you have it, read it.

**Reader:**

The fact is that not one of these is true. And if you have heard that I undertake to educate men, and make money by so doing, that is not true either—

**LS:** Now may I say one little thing<sup>62</sup> which could be brought out in the translation? He says, “to educate human beings.” That occurs all the time, because that includes in itself also women and slaves, naturally. The Greek<sup>63</sup> emphatic word is different from human beings: it is men,

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<sup>xxx</sup> Mr. Metzel serves as reader here.

*andras*,<sup>xxxii</sup> *hombres*. That<sup>xxxiii</sup> has a kind of derogatory meaning: that he teaches, educates such creatures, you know, such animals as men. Yes?

**Reader:**

though I think that it would be a fine thing to be able to educate men—

**LS:** “This *too* would be fine.” Namely, just as astronomy and so on would be fine. Yes?

**Reader:**

as Gorgias of Leontini, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis do. For each of them, my friends, can go into any city, and persuade the young men to leave the society of their fellow citizens, with any of whom they might associate for nothing, and to be only too glad to be allowed to pay money for the privilege of associating with themselves. And I believe that there is another wise man from Paros residing in Athens at this moment. I happened to meet Callias, the son of Hipponicus—

**LS:** Yes, that: I happened to meet an *hombre*. He does not call him, Callias, that big shot of an old family<sup>64</sup> and with all the decorations you could imagine, [an *anthrōpos*]. Him he does not call a human being simply: he’s an *hombre*. Yes?

**Reader:**

a man who has spent more money on sophists than everyone else put together. So I said to him (he has two sons), “Callias, if your two sons had been foals or calves, we could have hired a trainer for them who would have trained them to excel in doing what they are naturally capable of. He would have been either a groom or a farmer. But whom do you intend to take to train them, seeing that they are men?”

**LS:** “They are human beings.” Yes. You see, that’s another animal in the speech here. Yes?

**Reader:**

“Who understands the excellence which a man and a citizen is capable of attaining?”<sup>65</sup>

**LS:** Right here. “Who is an expert,” let us say,<sup>66</sup> “in that excellence of this nature, the human, as well as political, excellence?” Yes?

**Reader:**

“I suppose that you must have thought of this, because you have sons.

**LS:** That is also . . . “because of the acquisition of sons” [LS laughs], you see, just as he had acquired cows and colts. [Laughter] Yes. And the acquisition is here not by sale, obviously. Not by purchase, I mean. Yes?

**Reader:**

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<sup>xxxii</sup> *Anēr*, *andros*. Strauss gives the accusative plural form.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> I.e., *anthropoi*, human beings.

“Is there such a person or not?” “Certainly there is,” he replied. “Who is he,” I said, “and where does he come from, and what is his fee?”

**LS:** You see, “Where does he come from?” He is of course not an Athenian. Ya?

**Reader:**

“Evenus, Socrates,” he replied, “from Paros, five minae.”

**LS:** You see how strictly he answers each question, ya?, like a questionnaire: “Who? Where from? For what amount?” Yes?

**Reader:**

Then I thought that Evenus was a fortunate person if he really understood this art—<sup>xxxiv</sup>

**LS:** <sup>xxxv</sup>—because there is another field, in our language: not the natural sciences, but the social sciences, which Socrates might teach. I mean, the art of making human beings good as human beings and as citizens, that art exists. Socrates says: Wonderful to have it; I do not have it, unfortunately. Socrates does not possess it. Ya. But he treats of two subjects—natural science and social science, as I call it, or astronomy and educating human beings—differently. Did you see how he treats them differently? You must watch that. We cannot, unfortunately, go into all details in the work, but some we must call up. What does that mean?

**Student:** . . . a specific interlocutor.

**LS:** <sup>67</sup>Ya. That is true. And why does he do that? Why does he do that? Did he mention—

**Student:** Superficially, to proceed on what Callias had given him to go on.

**LS:** Ya, but why does he have to do that? I mean, it was known fact that there were professional teachers of the excellence of human beings and citizens, and why does he have to bring that [in]? Let me<sup>68</sup> come back to that. That is correct. I think the first point is this. In the first case, in the case of astronomy, he exhibits witnesses that he does not possess knowledge of that. Who are the witnesses? The many. In the second case, regarding educating human beings and citizens, a parallel art to the art of educating colts and calves, he does not exhibit witnesses. Why not? He does not attempt even to prove that he possesses that art, or does not possess that art. Why?

**Student:** Is it not notorious that he does possess it? Is it not notorious that he does possess it?

**LS:** I do not understand the second half of your sentence. “That he—?”

**Same Student:** That he does possess that art?

**LS:** Apparently not. Apparently no one in Athens believed for one moment that Socrates possesses the art of educating human beings and citizens. The first was at least believed. He had

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> *Apology* 19c-20c.

<sup>xxxv</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

to prove it. No one thought that of Socrates, that he would educate.<sup>69</sup> And he gives an indirect proof why no one believes it by this story. What does he do? Yes?

**Student:** If he did possess the art, then he would be a wealthy man because he would make money out of it. And he is obviously not a wealthy man, and therefore he doesn't—

**LS:** Yes. Sure. That comes later. But more simply, let's stick to the story here. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:** This man is an expert. He spent a lot of money looking for teachers of this type.

**LS:** He sends other people to the educators. He does not educate them. And this of course also means that he thinks that is perfectly all right. I mean, just as you have to bring up colts and you look for the best groom, Socrates is only more informed about the best trainers of humans, and if he hears there is someone around, he sends people to them. And mind you, given the prejudice against these terrible foreign sophists, ya?, it would be quite an act of conscience to . . . perfectly all right, everyone does that who can afford it. Callias, the richest man of Athens at some time, does it, and naturally<sup>70</sup> I would have helped him but for the fact that Callias had already anticipated me. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:** But isn't this a witness in that Callias, who has paid for education of others and looked for teachers, does not recognize Socrates as a teacher?

**LS:** Sure, it doesn't occur to him for one moment that Socrates would do that. Ya? That only confirms that there was no suspicion of Socrates as an educator. Ya, there is something else, however, which was not settled between Mr. Kendrick and me.

**Mr. Kendrick:** There is already a teacher of these young men. An official.

**LS:** Official? No. No, that's all private. All private.

**Mr. Kendrick:** Okay, well, that was—

**LS:** No welfare state. [LS chuckles] It's all private. No, but something else. You see, he tells the story of Callias and of Evenus of Paros. These are two individuals mentioned by proper names. But there are some other proper names mentioned here before; we have to put it on a broader basis: Prodicus, Hippias and Gorgias. Did he mention any proper names in speaking of astronomers? Hmm? That's interesting. I suggest—

**Mr. Metzel:** Later.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Metzel:** Later.

**LS:** Later. Ya, sure, when he's compelled<sup>71</sup> in self-defense to mention Anaxagoras. That I know. It is not odious in any way to be a teacher of human beings in the excellence of human beings

and of citizens. But astronomy is odious. That, I think, is the explanation of that. So he has finished the first accusers. They don't have a leg to stand on. Ya?

**Student:** Is there a series of trials before Socrates's trial in Athens of other sophists? I read that somewhere.

**LS:** Ya, ya. Sure, sure. You can draw up a long list. It is not even necessary to go into very out-of-the-way literature. If you read only Diogenes Laertius's *Lives* and see who of them got in trouble in Athens. The most famous case is Anaxagoras. And the case of Protagoras, ya? Protagoras was accused because he had written a book which begins with this sentence: "Whether there are gods or not, I do not know. The obscurity of the matter, as well as the brevity of my life, prevents me from knowing it."<sup>xxxvi</sup> <sup>72</sup> And then of course he was burned by the hangman, so to speak, and he was . . . Sure. And there are many other cases; I've forgotten now the names, but it's easy to assemble them.

There was a technical term: the charge was impiety—*asebeia*, in Greek, and the *asebeia* trials played a great role. In the nineteenth century and to some extent even up to our times, the tendency was not to believe that the real subject of the trials was impiety, because they believed that persecution is an invention of the Old Testament and therefore of Christianity and Islam, and classical antiquity was free from that vice. You know? And therefore they said the real reason is political. For example, Socrates was hated because of his connection with these subversive political fellows like Alcibiades and Critias, and that<sup>xxxvii</sup> was only a *prophasis*—what is that? An excuse—

**Student:** Pretext.

**LS:** Pardon? Pretense, pretense<sup>73</sup>—or what did you say?

**Same Student:** Pretext.

**LS:** Yes, pretext, that's the right word, thank you: a pretext in order to do that. And Burnet,<sup>xxxviii</sup> who is one of the most respected of the classical scholars of the last generation, his whole interpretation of Socrates and the trial is based on that.<sup>xxxix</sup> But one can only say: You cannot accuse Socrates on the basis of a pretext, if this [pretext] is not a crime. The prohibition was there. And<sup>74</sup> I think Burnet's interpretation can be refuted not a hundred percent but five hundred percent by the text of Plato's *Apology* alone, without going into any other texts of the same time.

And<sup>75</sup> if you use some of these modern terms, there was a kind of hysteria at the time of Socrates's trial. There is a brief writing of Isocrates, of very great subtlety, called the *Busiris*.

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> See, e.g., Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), fr. 4, 126.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> That is, the charge of *asebeia*, impiety.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Scottish classicist John Burnet.

<sup>xxxix</sup> See for instance Burnet's commentary on the *Apology* in Plato. *Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito*. ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), esp. the notes introducing 18a7-19a7, 24b3-28a1, and 24c9-28a1.

[LS writes on the blackboard] The *Busiris*, a very subtle piece. And Mr. Bloom, in his doctoral dissertation,<sup>x1</sup> which is unfortunately not published, has interpreted that very well. And there Isocrates<sup>76</sup> [says] that philosophy was crushed completely by virtue of the Thirty Tyrants, and that [there] was a real flight and fear.<sup>xli</sup> I mean,<sup>77</sup> what some people think has happened in this country under McCarthy<sup>xlii</sup> is absolutely child's play in every respect compared with what happened there. [That] the guiding people there were democrats, members of the democratic party—in the Athenian sense, which is not the American sense—is true,<sup>78</sup> and whether they were honest in that matter, whether they did not have the feeling of Socrates at the time of [being the] origin of all these goings-on, and these clubs and that, that is possible. No one knows. It may have been personal hatred, for all we know. But the main point is they could appeal to a law and to a strong public sentiment supporting them. That is undeniable. And<sup>79</sup> it is absolutely silly to speak of Athens as a liberal city. A liberal city is a city which has a First Amendment or an equivalent of that. Athens did not have a First Amendment, and it was a capital crime not to believe in the gods of the city, proven merely just in this case.

That there was in Athens also a substantial part of the population, say, fifty percent of the population, who thought differently is clear, because Socrates was not unanimously condemned and there was a shifting vote. These people might have acquitted Socrates if Socrates had perhaps flattered them a bit more, or whatever may be, but that this was a legal crime, there is no doubt about that. And even another crime to which Socrates refers, regarding the generals of Arginusae, that was also a religious crime. It was a question not of not saving shipwrecked sailors, but of not bringing home the corpses for orthodox burial. And many other cases of this kind. So that is, I think, [that] the modern liberal line has aided a kind of myth about the past<sup>80</sup> which must be revised, because<sup>81</sup> as social scientists we cannot afford the luxury to be mythologists, and therefore we have to try to bring this to light.<sup>82</sup>

Where are we now? Socrates has proven that the first accusers really do not have a leg to stand on. But that is very bad for him as an orator, because he has proved too much. How could he have become suspect in the first place if he had no *sophia*, no wisdom whatever? After all, he was notorious as a wise man. And now he says, "There are two kinds of wisdom, the natural sciences and the social sciences: I have none of them." Will you read that, beginning where he makes the transition?

**Reader:**

Perhaps some of you may reply: "But, Socrates, what is the trouble with you?"

**LS:** That is not well translated. It would be better to say, "What is your business?" What is *to pragma*?<sup>83</sup> Coming from *prattein*, doing. "What is your business?" "What is your affair?" Ya?

**Reader:**

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<sup>x1</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Political Philosophy of Isocrates*. (Unpublished dissertation. University of Chicago, 1955.)

<sup>xli</sup> Isocrates, *Busiris*, 49.

<sup>xlii</sup> Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957), Republican Senator from Wisconsin. Between 1950 and 1954 he led a series of investigations into alleged Communist infiltration of areas of American life, including the State Department, the White House, the Treasury Department, and the US Army.



“What has given rise to these prejudices against you? You must have been doing something out of the ordinary. All these rumors and reports of you would never have arisen if you had not been doing something different from other men. So tell us what it is, that we may not give our verdict arbitrarily.” I think that is a fair question, and I will try to explain to you what it is that has raised these prejudices against me and given me this reputation. (20c-d)

**LS:** Now let us stop here. Yes, “this name and this calumny.” “Prejudice” is not a word which has a Greek equivalent.

Socrates is going to answer the question. He repeats what he had said before: I will<sup>84</sup> tell you the whole truth.<sup>xliii</sup> Socrates says: As a matter of fact, I do possess some wisdom.<sup>85</sup> Some wisdom, yes, but it is entirely different from these two things. It is perhaps the human wisdom, in contradistinction to the superhuman wisdom of the astronomers and the sophists. Both the fact that Socrates possesses such wisdom and its character is vouched for by the Delphian god. The god in Delphi said something about Socrates’s wisdom. But here is the difficulty. Under what conditions did the god speak? Did he suddenly say, “Socrates is wise”? Or was there an incentive for the god to speak?

**Mr. Metzel:** His cohort, Chaerephon, went to him with a rhetorical question.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Metzel:** His friend went with a rhetorical question.

**LS:** Ya, whether the question was rhetorical or not, we don’t know. But one thing is clear: the god spoke in reply to a question—ya? That we can safely say, a question raised by Chaerephon. Good. Now let us consider. Chaerephon: a well-known comrade of Socrates of the first hour, the old generation, and<sup>86</sup> we see [him as] a companion of Socrates in *The Clouds*,<sup>xliv</sup> you know. And [he is] frequently presented because of his paleness, and he was called the Bat<sup>xlv</sup> because he never came out by day, and this kind of thing. All right. But how did Chaerephon get this idea to go to Delphi and to ask the god? After all, you don’t go to some place and ask, “Is this and this man wise?” Ya? Or, “What do you think of that man’s wisdom?”<sup>87</sup> I mean, Socrates must have had something in him which induced Chaerephon to go to Delphi and ask that. I’m not now concerned with his motives, whether he wanted to prevent persecution of Socrates by that, as some people have suggested; that may be true and may be not. But still, what is the premise of such a question in itself, on the simplest straightforward level?

**Student:** Chaerephon thought he was.

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<sup>xliii</sup> Plato, *Apology* 20d. Strauss’s translation (*pasan hymin tēn alētheian erō*). Cf. note xv.

<sup>xliv</sup> Aristophanes, *Clouds*, ll. 103-104, 144-147, 156-158, 503-504, 831. Chaerephon is mentioned also in the *Birds* (ll. 1296, 1562-1564) and in the *Wasps* (1408, 1412-1414), where he possibly appears as a silent character.

<sup>xlv</sup> Aristophanes, *Birds*, ll. 1296 and 1564. “Chaerephon” has since become the name of a genus of bats.

**LS:** Yes. Absolutely. Chaerephon presupposes, prior to going to Delphi, that Socrates is wise. Ya. And he has led this to a very great conclusion. Those of you who have read this assignment for today have all the data needed for getting a great surprise, if they don't have it already.

Socrates describes, in the immediate sequel, his wisdom. Ya? But this wisdom of Socrates as described in the *Apology* is, if I may say so, post-Delphic: that arises out of the oracle. The oracle<sup>88</sup> induces Socrates to do certain things, and these certain things constitute Socrates's wisdom. But these things, this post-Delphic wisdom, was not the wisdom on the basis of which Chaerephon went to Delphi. That seems to be a necessary conclusion. Ya? What was that pre-Delphic wisdom of Socrates of which Chaerephon was aware? Not a word is said about that here. [It's] anybody's guess. Anybody's guess. It might have been something like astronomy. We don't know.

Well, that's very interesting, but that there was a pre-Delphic wisdom is proven by the fact. You can also<sup>89</sup> apply to Socrates the distinction which is commonly applied to Kant, whose writings are divided into the critical writings, *Critique of Pure Reason*, etc., and the precritical writings, which Kant wrote prior to that. You can also say there was a critical Socratic wisdom: the wisdom of the revered Socrates, which we know; and there was a precritical Socratic wisdom, of which we have a caricature in the *Clouds*, and there is more evidence for that wholly independent of Aristophanes. For example, Socrates says in the *Phaedo* what Xenophon indicates in the *Oeconomicus* and what Socrates indicates to some extent in the *Parmenides*, as well as in the *Banquet*, as I believe I have shown last quarter.<sup>xlvi</sup> But still, let us forget about these other things. Mr. Cohen?

**Mr. Cohen:** That was just my question.

**LS:** I see. So Chaerephon knew of the Socratic wisdom antedating the Delphic wisdom. But Socrates says something else about Chaerephon which is not unimportant. Chaerephon is known to everyone. You see, he says here: "For Chaerephon you know somehow."<sup>xlvii</sup> He does not say "from that comedy of Aristophanes," which would have been most improper, but what does he say?<sup>90</sup> How does everyone know of Chaerephon? Yes?

**Reader:**

"From youth upward he was my constant companion, or comrade; a partisan of your democracy."<sup>xlviii</sup>

**LS:** Well, literally, "A comrade to your multitude." Ya? "And he was exiled with you." Ya? "And he returned with you."<sup>xlix</sup> Now here he refers of course not to every individual Athenian, because not every individual Athenian was exiled and returned. It was the fighting part of the

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Strauss taught a seminar on Plato's *Symposium* in the autumn quarter, 1959. See *Leo Strauss on Plato's Symposium*, ed. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>xlvii</sup> Plato, *Apology* 20e. Strauss's translation.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Plato, *Apology*, in *Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito*, trans. F. J. Church. rev., Robert D. Cumming (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), 25 (21a). Church has "From youth upwards he was my comrade; and also a partisan of your democracy."

<sup>xlix</sup> Strauss continues from where the student leaves off in 21a with his own translation.

democracy, ya? The fighting part. Especially the great leader was Thrasybulus, who had nothing to do with that. Thrasybulus. And<sup>91</sup> so Chaerephon is the link between Socrates and the democracy, which implies of course—and we cannot possibly overlook that—that Socrates himself was *not* a comrade of the democracy. Chaerephon was the link. Now what did the god say? Let us read this sentence that is immediately afterwards.

**Reader:**

“Once he went to Delphi and he ventured to put this question to the oracle—I entreat you again, my friends, not to interrupt me with your shouts—he asked if there was someone<sup>1</sup> who was wiser than I. The priestess answered that there was no one. Chaerephon himself is dead, but his brother here will witness to what I say.” (21a)

**LS:** Yes. So in other words, that is a crude, demonstrable fact: the living witness Chaerephon. What did the priestess, the Pythia, say? “No one is wiser than Socrates.” That started the whole thing. Yes, but that is an oracle and oracles need interpretation; they are not unambiguous by nature. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:** There’s a presupposition of wisdom here, though. Just because no one is wiser than Socrates doesn’t mean that he is wise.

**LS:** Surely not. Absolutely. All right, what would be the alternative? I mean, develop that thought. What could the priestess have meant? You see, also it’s important<sup>92</sup> [that] Chaerephon was not addressed by Apollo. He was addressed by a human being speaking for Apollo. That is not unimportant. Now this woman said: No one is wiser than Socrates. What could she have meant?

**Student:** All men are ignorant and only the god is wise.

**LS:** <sup>93</sup>Let us make it quite clear: All men are unwise. Sure. That’s it. But did Socrates choose to understand it this way? How did he understand it?

**Mr. Metzel:** After the investigations, that he is the wisest—

**LS:** No, but—pardon?

**Student:** That he is the wisest of all men. He says—

**LS:** [It is] very clear in the sequel, 21b5 to 6. What does he say? “Asserting that I am most wise, otherwise—”

**Reader:** “I am not wise.” He says, “I know I am not wise.”<sup>li</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Church has “anyone.”

<sup>li</sup> Plato, *Apology* 21b. Strauss has in mind the passage: “Whatever, therefore, is [the oracle] saying by asserting that I am the wisest?” The student has in mind the immediately preceding sentence, again, in 21b: “For, in fact, I recognize, for my own part, that I am neither greatly wise, nor [even] a little wise.” The confusion is clarified by Strauss’s next statement.

**LS:** Yes, but that he didn't know yet. He understood this statement, "No one is wiser than Socrates," as meaning Socrates is most wise.

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, in the sequel to this—

**LS:** Yes, but that is what he *finds out*. You see, the god is much wiser than Socrates. Much wiser. Socrates misunderstands the god.<sup>94</sup> That he shows.<sup>95</sup> He understands the god to mean that Socrates is most wise. And then he starts on an inquiry as to the meaning of that absolutely unintelligible<sup>96</sup> oracle, because Socrates knows he is not wise and now the god tells him he's most wise. What does this mean? It's fantastic. And then he makes an inquiry, and the result of the inquiry is that he understands the god to mean that<sup>97</sup> all men are unwise, and Socrates in particular. With a slight change: Socrates is unwise, yes, but he is still wiser than everyone else because he knows that he is unwise. [LS laughs] So you see, neither the one nor the other extreme interpretation is valid.

Now<sup>98</sup> this gross misunderstanding that Socrates is most wise is of course, as some kind of psychology would tell you, not altogether meaningless. You see, Socrates must have had some notion. I mean, although he couldn't believe that the god meant it so literally,<sup>99</sup> [yet] somehow, if he had not had the feeling that he was not altogether unwise, he would not have misunderstood the god that way. To make it clear, let us assume that someone particularly ugly would be told by the goddess: You are the most handsome man, more handsome than Gary Cooper or any other hero. Now<sup>100</sup> the god's crazy, ya? Socrates doesn't say the god is crazy. He doesn't understand it,<sup>101</sup> but he cannot simply reject it.

Now how does he argue? Yes, we must now stop. At this point, we might as well stop. What then does he<sup>102</sup> assert by saying that I am wisest? For he does not lie, after all. Ya? For it would not be right for him.<sup>lii</sup> It would not be right for Apollo. What this sentence means,<sup>103</sup> the explanation of this point, "would not be right for him," is given in the second book of the *Republic*, where Socrates discusses whether the gods may lie.<sup>liii</sup> Socrates is not aware of possessing any wisdom. On the other hand, he knows that the god does not lie, for it's not right for him to lie. Wherein does this wisdom lie? You see, we must follow that step by step, always ask: What is Socrates's wisdom, natural science excluded, social science excluded? What is it? But he knows, he has knowledge. He knows that the god cannot lie. What is that wisdom? I mean, that's knowledge or wisdom; you can use them exchangeably here. Should his wisdom not consist in believing in the oracles? Then of course it would not be a distinctive wisdom, because many other people believed in the oracles. But we have to wait.

But this hypothesis is unfortunately destroyed immediately after it has occurred to us, because how does he go on? "And for a long time<sup>104</sup> I was embarrassed as to what he asserts." Yes? Do you have that? "And after, with some hemming and hawing," one could translate, I turned to an investigation of him," the god.<sup>liv</sup>

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<sup>lii</sup> Plato *Apology* 21b. Strauss's translation.

<sup>liii</sup> Plato *Republic* 382a-383c.

<sup>liv</sup> Plato *Apology* 21b. Strauss's translation.

**Reader:**

“I went to a man who was reputed to be wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I should prove the answer wrong.” (21b-c)

**LS:** Let us stop here. “I should refute the oracle.” So a man who is going about to refute an oracle is not a man who believes in oracles simply. That’s impossible. I make this suggestion, which is also very tentative: after our attempt to identify Socrates’s wisdom with belief in oracles has been refuted by the text, what new suggestion would develop from this immediate context, as a very tentative suggestion?

**Student:** That his wisdom consists in skepticism.

**LS:** In not believing. Yes, let us be very simple [and] not use such big terms. In not believing the oracles. Perhaps. We don’t know that. And at any rate, now begins a long disquisition of Socrates’s attempt to refute the oracle, and this refutation consists in a simple empirical test: The god has said I’m wiser than my fellow citizens. Now I look at my fellow citizens, and I prove to be wiser than they. So the god is right. That is his wisdom. Ya, but is there not one—we must stop at this point, unfortunately<sup>105</sup>—remarkable thing about this examination of the fellow citizens? He doesn’t examine everyone: he uses samples, naturally. To this extent, he is a practical man. But does he use samples of all classes?

**Mr. Metzel:** No philosophers.

**LS:** How do you know that there were any philosophers in Athens? But go on. You are on a scent.

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, politicians and public men, poets, and diviners, and artisans are the object[s] of his search. But<sup>106</sup> we do know at least from Plato, if we can believe Plato, that he did speak with people whom he thought had ideas,<sup>107</sup> and always his answers to them were just not politeness. He did think they had ideas, and was willing to go along with their thoughts and investigate them. These men, he thought, had some type of wisdom.

**LS:** You mean the craftsmen?

**Mr. Metzel:** No, the people he was talking with in the Platonic dialogues. Some of them.

**LS:** But you don’t know that yet.<sup>108</sup> You see, you must not forget, the *Apology of Socrates* is the only Platonic work with the name of Socrates in the title. Ya? And, in a way, that is the entrance door to the whole thing. Here you get a presentation of Socrates, [a] self-presentation of Socrates, given to the whole citizen body of Athens: so to say, *the* official version. Because<sup>109</sup> no occasion is more solemn than if you have to defend yourself against a capital charge relating to your whole life, not to a particular murder or so which you might have committed. Therefore, that is really a grave thing. No, but you were on a scent, and let us try to get—

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, no, but I don't know whether I can agree with what you just said.<sup>110</sup> You mention some by indirection, for instance, by [the fact that] there might be others he did not talk to.

**LS:** No, but honestly,<sup>111</sup> what would you regard, I mean, a competent examination? He doesn't have to talk to every individual, because there are some people who are notoriously dumb, and to examine them is really a waste of time, although a social scientist today would perhaps think they also should be examined [LS chuckles].

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, he goes to those who are supported by public opinion.

**LS:** Very good: *supposed* to be wise. That's the word. Now supposed to be wise means of course the statesmen. Naturally.<sup>112</sup> I mean, men who are able to manage the affairs of the city must be wiser than men who can only manage their own little household. That's clear. The other kind is the poets: surely men of authority, generally regarded as wise men about the whole human life, and not only about the polity and policy of Athens. And the other one[s] are the specialists who have some special wisdom, because these craftsmen include of course such people as physicians, too. Good. So there is no other class in Athens which is omitted. If you say the oracle men, they are also taken care of with the poets. But the unscientific limitation of Socrates's test lies elsewhere. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:** Socrates did not conceive of himself as belonging to any of these inclusive classes.

**LS:** Ya,<sup>113</sup> but his examination could take on only the form of comparative examination, comparative with others. Is he wiser or not wiser than the others? And therefore Socrates himself is out. But I mean, what kind of people does he not examine? The kind of people mentioned already, so we don't have to have any recondite knowledge. Yes?

**Student:** The educators.

**LS:** Ya. On what grounds are they excluded from the examination—I mean, from the explicit examination?

**Same Student:** Didn't the oracle say that any Athenian—?

**LS:** Exactly. I mean, by limiting this long and detailed quest to his fellow citizens, he excludes these distinguished foreigners who had also, according to ordinary opinion, a very high claim to wisdom.<sup>114</sup> I mean, you are perfectly right: Socrates examines these fellows like Protagoras and Gorgias and Hippias, and the astronomers, too, in the *Theaetetus*, for example, but in this presentation to the Athenian multitude, he does not refer to that except by a casual remark that he examined both fellow citizens and foreigners. He makes that [distinction], but there is no class. This class is not examined. That would be too high for that purpose. The whole mystery of this work, I think, consists in the fact that the ceiling, the horizon, is terribly low. Terribly low. Socrates really talks down, has to talk down in the spirit of this remark I read to you from the *Gorgias*, and we must see later on how this comes out.<sup>115</sup> Of course, later on he takes out one of these many men of Athens, who is particularly pertinent for the occasion, namely, the accuser,

the poet Meletus, and then he can easily show his superiority to him. But let us keep in mind this question: We have to see, what is Socrates's wisdom; that is, the most elementary presentation of Socrates's wisdom? We are coming to that. Of what does it consist? To repeat: astronomy, natural science on the one hand, educating human beings and citizens are both excluded. What is that? It is an absolute riddle. Where do we find it? Just as in the *Republic*, the question is, they can't find justice and, you know, they look around and then they say: It's lying in front of our feet, and that's the reason why we overlooked it.<sup>lv116</sup> Something similar is true of that wisdom: it is so inconspicuous. And we must try to interpret that. Some one of you wanted to ask again?

**Mr. Gildin:** Yes. When he talks about his three accusers and the people they represent, the last one represents the orators, and I wondered what are the orators as distinguished from the statesmen, whom he also doesn't seem to question? Are they something like a domestic sophist or—?

**LS:** The orators are not the rhetoricians. Gorgias is a teacher of orators, of rhetoric. A teacher of orators is not himself necessarily an orator. Ya?

**Mr. Gildin:** Nor are they statesmen.

**LS:** No, we must go to that. I mean, there is a certain ambiguity, and I think it is due to the fact—it has something to do with the ambiguity of the Greek word *dēmiourgoi*, which is first used in the sense of artisans and then used in a different sense. We will take up this next time. Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** Might it be that by the time a statesman is a statesman, he's living off the public and no longer has to have a livelihood like an orator might still have to have?

**LS:** And how does it affect the question of wisdom?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, then you have the three types of people.

**LS:** Well, we will take that up next time. I mean, we will see that there are other irregularities there which we have to discuss. Good.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted "but."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "if you take for—."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "Why do we not—."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "because Socrates did not—."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "I do not quite—."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "would—."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "That therefore—."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "they go on—."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "and—."

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "He is—."

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "with."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "I think you have in no—."

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<sup>lv</sup> Plato, *Republic* 432d.

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- <sup>13</sup> Deleted “that not only—.”  
<sup>14</sup> Deleted “in this—.”  
<sup>15</sup> Deleted “have—and make—.”  
<sup>16</sup> Deleted “That.”  
<sup>17</sup> Deleted “that—.”  
<sup>18</sup> Deleted “let me see whether is—I cannot go into—yes.”  
<sup>19</sup> Deleted “it so happens—.”  
<sup>20</sup> Deleted “sycophant—.”  
<sup>21</sup> Deleted “there were none around.”  
<sup>22</sup> Deleted “1073—.”  
<sup>23</sup> Deleted “there is—.”  
<sup>24</sup> Deleted “that is perfect—.”  
<sup>25</sup> Deleted “is not—.”  
<sup>26</sup> Deleted “because that—.”  
<sup>27</sup> Deleted “have been—.”  
<sup>28</sup> Deleted “We cannot—.”  
<sup>29</sup> Deleted “there are—.”  
<sup>30</sup> Deleted “everyone will treat—.”  
<sup>31</sup> Deleted “in Aristophanes—.”  
<sup>32</sup> Deleted “That is—.”  
<sup>33</sup> Deleted “an intelligent, but not—.”  
<sup>34</sup> Deleted “That we have to—.”  
<sup>35</sup> Deleted “It is impossible to—.”  
<sup>36</sup> Deleted “he makes it—.”  
<sup>37</sup> Deleted “on.”  
<sup>38</sup> Deleted “on.”  
<sup>39</sup> Deleted “, he.”  
<sup>40</sup> Deleted “That he does not possess the—.”  
<sup>41</sup> Deleted “but.”  
<sup>42</sup> Deleted “where.”  
<sup>43</sup> Deleted “Yes, but that—.”  
<sup>44</sup> Deleted “via—.”  
<sup>45</sup> Deleted “by their—.”  
<sup>46</sup> Deleted “the majority—.”  
<sup>47</sup> Deleted “that’s—.”  
<sup>48</sup> Deleted “That is—.”  
<sup>49</sup> Deleted “the weak speech—.”  
<sup>50</sup> Deleted “about—.”  
<sup>51</sup> Deleted “that.”  
<sup>52</sup> Deleted “he.”  
<sup>53</sup> Deleted “this is—.”  
<sup>54</sup> Deleted “but it is not—.”  
<sup>55</sup> Deleted “does things—he.”  
<sup>56</sup> Deleted “that.”  
<sup>57</sup> Deleted “The fact is—.”  
<sup>58</sup> Deleted “Now, I am—.”  
<sup>59</sup> Deleted “, he.”  
<sup>60</sup> Deleted “there is—.”  
<sup>61</sup> Deleted “This—.”  
<sup>62</sup> Deleted “which cannot be—.”  
<sup>63</sup> Deleted “—the.”  
<sup>64</sup> Deleted “and with—well.”  
<sup>65</sup> Deleted “I suppose that—.”  
<sup>66</sup> Deleted “in such—.”  
<sup>67</sup> Deleted “With a specific—.”  
<sup>68</sup> Deleted “start from—I mean.”



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- 69 Deleted "And he proves—."  
 70 Deleted "I helped him—."  
 71 Deleted "by—."  
 72 Deleted "Meaning, you know, that is the."  
 73 Deleted "in order."  
 74 Deleted "it is made—."  
 75 Deleted "it was clearly—I mean,."  
 76 Deleted "speaks."  
 77 Deleted "that—."  
 78 Deleted "but—."  
 79 Deleted "there is no—I mean,."  
 80 Deleted "and—."  
 81 Deleted "we are—."  
 82 Deleted "Now,."  
 83 Deleted "What is the—."  
 84 Deleted "say—."  
 85 Deleted "And that—."  
 86 Deleted "he—."  
 87 Deleted "There must be—."  
 88 Deleted "induces him,."  
 89 Deleted "say—."  
 90 Deleted "How do—."  
 91 Deleted "that was—they—."  
 92 Deleted "is not how—."  
 93 Deleted "All men are—."  
 94 Deleted "and thinks—."  
 95 Deleted "The gods—."  
 96 Deleted "miracle—."  
 97 Deleted "Socrates—."  
 98 Deleted "this mere misunderstanding—."  
 99 Deleted "but."  
 100 Deleted "that would—."  
 101 Deleted "but—he doesn't understand,."  
 102 Deleted "say—."  
 103 Deleted "can only—."  
 104 Deleted "I was—I did not—."  
 105 Deleted ". Is there not—there is one."  
 106 Deleted "as far as—."  
 107 Deleted "even if this—."  
 108 Deleted "We are here—."  
 109 Deleted "that is really—."  
 110 Deleted "because you say—all right—."  
 111 Deleted "but."  
 112 Deleted "The second—."  
 113 Deleted "he could not—I mean, the question is—."  
 114 Deleted "Socrates—."  
 115 Deleted ", and especially also—."  
 116 Deleted "That is—."  
 117 Deleted "And I think we don't need a paper next Wednesday, this Wednesday, but next Monday, Mr. Stand—"

## Session 10: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —finish our discussion of the first half of the *Apology* today. Perhaps I should say a word about the plan before we start. There is first the proemium, introduction; then the discussion of the first accusers; and then the discussion with Meletus; and then a final part of the apology, of the defense. That goes 'til 34b, where it's explicitly said that's the end of the defense. And then an epilogue. And then we have a new part in which the punishment is proposed; and finally, a speech after the condemnation. This speech after the condemnation is subdivided into an address: one to those who have condemned him, and one to those who have acquitted him. So you can say it consists of seven or of eight parts. And we are now discussing still<sup>1</sup> the apology with the first accusers.

I remind you of the most important point: the first accusers say that Socrates is an astronomer and a rhetorician, and that he teaches others astronomy and rhetoric. He refutes that by an appeal to the accusers: You know that I do not do that, you the many. But then<sup>2</sup> he does something supererogatory by showing that he does not teach also in another kind: he does not teach others human and political virtue, meaning for pay. In this connection the word “sophist” is used. That's very interesting. Socrates is not a sophist, but sophist does not have here a derogatory meaning. These [are] men who teach, for pay, human and political virtue. Socrates even says that he encourages people to send their sons to the sophists. But this wisdom too he does not possess.

Now if we look at the discussion with some care, we see that Socrates does not truly refute the charge of the first accusers: he refutes only the assertion that he teaches these things for money, [that] he teaches astronomy and rhetoric for money, that he teaches them publicly, because that—I say he refutes it, because anyone could have stood up and said, “Well, I know that<sup>3</sup> my cousin or who[ever] else went to take courses with you.” Furthermore, we have seen that after the accusation is refuted, Socrates has to explain to the Athenians why did he become so famous, so notorious, so obnoxious, and then he tells the story of the oracle at Delphi. His comrade Chaerephon went there in order to ask the god who's wiser than Socrates. Now Chaerephon presupposed that Socrates was wise, but at that time Socrates did not yet have that wisdom of which he speaks later, so that you must make a distinction between Socrates's pre-Delphic wisdom and his post-Delphic wisdom. And what the pre-Delphic wisdom was remains wholly obscure. We may imagine anything we please. Socrates does really not refute the charge that once upon a time he was like Aristophanes's Socrates. The only thing which he refutes clearly is that he had ever any dealings with fellows like Strepsiades, because if a Strepsiades had been around he could have easily stood up and said, “You lie. I went to you,” and so on.

Now we have to continue at this point, <sup>4</sup>because we are confronted with that question which Socrates himself raises: What is Socrates's wisdom? What is Socrates's distinction? Because a man who is merely lacking wisdom is not for this reason conspicuous and is not for this reason likely to become the target of accusations.

There is only one very little point which I thought I should mention to you. In his report about his conversation with Callias about Callias's two sons—do you remember that? That is in 20a. He says Callias has two sons. Ya? I asked a fellow who has two sons, Callias, if a guy's two sons

were two calves, or foals, or colts<sup>i</sup>—there is always a dual in Greek, naturally, a dual, so that this emphasizes [the twoness]. That’s funny, the two sons. I mean, you can of course say that it was a historical fact that Callias did have two sons, and I’m sure that it is so, but still it is strange. Why two? I read to you a passage from the *Laws*, 666e to 667a (that’s in the second book), the Athenian Stranger speaking to a Cretan and a Spartan:

Your polity<sup>ii</sup> is that of an army rather than that of city-dwellers, and you keep your young people massed together like a herd of colts at grass: none of you takes his own colt, dragging him away from his fellows, in spite of his fretting and fuming, and puts a special groom in charge of him, and trains him by rubbing him down and stroking him and using all the means proper to child-nursing, so that he may turn out not only a good soldier, but also able to manage a city and cities.<sup>iii</sup>

You see, the Spartan education is mass education—of course not what we understand today by mass education, but of herds. Of herds. The true education is that of an individual, with a private tutor who cares for him alone. Callias’s position is in-between. He seeks a teacher, a tutor for his *two* sons. Therefore, and that is a symbol of the fact that the virtues which his two sons are going to achieve are those<sup>5</sup> belonging to the virtue of a human being and of a citizen. The virtue of a human being simply would be that of the individual; that of the citizen, of a group. Two is in-between. Now let us begin at 21b9, at the moment where Socrates begins his examination of his fellow citizens.

### Reader:

I went to interview a man who had a high reputation for wisdom. I felt that here if anywhere I should succeed in disproving the oracle and pointing out to my divine authority “You said that I was the wisest of men, but here is a man who is wiser than I am.”

Well, I gave a thorough examination to this person—I need not mention his name, but it was one of our politicians that I was studying when I had this experience—and in conversation with him I formed the impression that although in many people’s opinion, and especially in his own, he appeared to be wise, in fact he was not. Then when I began to try to show him that he only thought he was wise and was not really so, my efforts were resented both by him and by many of the other people present. However, I reflected as I walked away: “Well, I am certainly wiser than this man. It is only too likely that neither of us has any knowledge to boast of; but he thinks that he knows something which he does not know, whereas I am quite conscious of my ignorance. At any rate it seems that I am wiser than he is to this small extent, that I do not think that I know what I do not know.”

After this I went on to interview a man with an even greater reputation for wisdom, and I formed the same impression again; and here too I incurred the resentment of the man himself and a number of others.

<sup>i</sup> Plato, *Apology* 20a. Strauss’s translation. See session 9.

<sup>ii</sup> Strauss may be reading from the Loeb edition, translated by R. G. Bury. Bury has “civic organisation.”

<sup>iii</sup> *Laws* 666e-667a.

**LS:** Yes, let us stop here. “Many of them.” Yes? “Many others.” So the first examination is then apparently of the political man. There is one expression which is crucial: “For neither of us,” he says, “seems to know anything noble and good.” Anything noble and good. In other words, no one is *completely* ignorant. For example, clearly<sup>6</sup> each knows that the other is a human being, and that they are in the city of Athens and so on. The word “knowledge” is here used in the widest sense. But they know nothing worthwhile, nothing noble and good. And one can also say that this implies also they do not know what the noble and good is, and that is the greatest implication, as will appear later. Let us read the immediate sequel where we left off. We cannot possibly read the whole.

**Reader:**

From that time on I interviewed one person after another. I realized with distress and alarm that I was making myself unpopular—<sup>7</sup>

**LS:** May I say, “that I became hated.” “Unpopular” is a euphemism. Ya?

**Reader:**

but I felt compelled to put my religious duty first.

**LS:** No, no, no, no. In other words, “it seemed to be necessary<sup>8</sup> to esteem most highly the affair of the god.”

**Reader:**

Since I was trying to find out the meaning of the oracle, I was bound to interview everyone who had a reputation for knowledge. And by Dog, gentlemen! (for I must be frank with you) my honest impression was this: it seemed to me, as I pursued my investigation at the god’s command, that the people with the greatest reputations were almost entirely deficient, while others who were supposed to be their inferiors were much better qualified in practical intelligence. (21b-22a)

**LS:** Ya, “with a view to being sensible” would be a better translation, or “with a view to conducting themselves sensibly.” You see that the examination of the god, the critical examination of the oracle, turns into obeying an injunction of the god. And that is of very great importance, namely, the injunction to find out the meaning of the oracle. And the whole quest of Socrates<sup>9</sup> proves to be a vindication of the oracle. Starting with a distrust of the oracle, it culminates in a vindication of the oracle. Socrates proves to be<sup>10</sup> the most sensible of these men. What does sensibility mean? *Phronēsis* is the Greek word. Prudence is the traditional translation of the word, the old sense of the word: prudence, practical wisdom. Socrates has more practical wisdom than the others. The astronomers<sup>11</sup> are wise, but they do not have practical wisdom. These men who can educate human beings—you remember?—in civic and human virtue, they also have wisdom. Practical wisdom is prudence: that is what Socrates has. In what does it consist? In what does Socrates’s practical wisdom consist? Practical wisdom is that wisdom which we need for acting as sensible human beings. For that purpose we do not need astronomy or rhetoric. Now in what does this practical wisdom consist, in Socrates’s case? Yes?

**Student:** Accurate knowledge of what he knows.

**LS:** You are pointing in the right direction, but a simpler and more hard-hitting expression we need. Knowledge of his ignorance. Ya, but how then can he live, if he knows only that he's ignorant? How can he act? What guides him? What gives him guidance? What guides him? Well, he tells us in a way what guides him. Yes?

**Student:** The oracle?

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** The oracle?

**LS:** The oracle, ya. We have to take this—the oracle, not the oracle as completely self-evident. Very far from it. The enigmatic character, the obscure character of the oracle: that guides him. We can perhaps put it as follows, taking a much later expression: Socrates has, in a way, faith in the oracle and he tries to understand that oracle, that which was later on called by Augustine “faith seeking understanding” of what was believed in. Socrates suggests something of this kind, and we must see whether this works out.

Now we come<sup>12</sup> to the second step. He turns now to other people. Oh, there is one point which we must discuss. “By the dog”: that was a question which you raised [for] us before class. What does this oath mean? It was not a coinage of Socrates; it occurs in Aristophanes. But what does it mean? I mean, it occurs more than once in the Platonic writings, although not everywhere. It never occurs in Xenophon. What does it mean? What is that? After all, it is a strange oath,<sup>13</sup> a colloquial oath, not belonging to elegant diction. Yes?

**Student:** Was it an attempt to avoid using the name of a god?

**LS:** Answer yourself.

**Same Student:** Yes.

**LS:** No! [Laughter] Because he says all the time “by Zeus” and “by Hera.” I think he swears in this very context somewhere, “by Zeus.” Ya? But he says “by Zeus” all the time. No, that can't be true. There is in the *Gorgias*, in *Gorgias* 482b,<sup>14</sup> a little explanation given: “By the Dog, god of the Egyptians.”<sup>iv</sup> That gives us some indication. Who were the Egyptians? I mean, apart<sup>15</sup> from the fact that they dwelt in the Nile Valley and built pyramids. The Egyptians were presented by Herodotus in his great work as men of excessive piety. They worshiped anything; and one could first say that it is a part of the fact that Socrates has a kind of extreme piety that he worshiped that. There is a funny passage in the dialogue *Lysis*, 211e, which I will read.

One person wants to get possession of horses, another dogs, another money, and another honors: of these things I reckon little, but for the possession of friends I have quite a passionate longing and would rather obtain a good friend than the best quail or cock in

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<sup>iv</sup> *Gorgias* 482b.

the world; yes, by Zeus, rather than any horse or dog [meaning these which are infinitely more valuable than a quail or a cock—LS]. I believe, even, by the Dog, that rather than all Darius's gold [the Persian king's gold—LS] I would choose to gain a dear comrade.<sup>v</sup>

You see, you have the two together: “by Zeus” [and] “by the dog,” and in the connection where he mentions dogs as a rather desirable possession.<sup>16</sup> Yes, a dog is mentioned together with a horse.

Xenophon, as I said, never mentions this oath of Socrates, but he does something equivalent. He tells a story of a man who has a herd threatened by wolves, and he seeks a dog to protect the herd. And then there is a conversation, if I remember well, between the dog and the wolf, and then a conversation between the dog and someone else. And then the dog swears by Zeus.<sup>vi</sup> [Laughter] That is the difference between Plato and<sup>17</sup> [Xenophon] [laughter], this little difference.

Now what really does it mean, if we do not take this ironical excessive piety too seriously? I believe it is a joke, and in a way a rather annoying joke, but I cannot prove that. I mean, there are certain suggestions in the *Euthyphron* which brought me to believe that, but I don't know whether this would stand up under analysis of all the passages. It is a kind of joke at vulgar piety, the belief in Zeus, Hera, and so on. Socrates, I believe, said this. You talk all the time about these gods as if you knew them. Ya? And you assume them. The poets talk about them, tell some stories as if they had been present.<sup>18</sup> They are presented as beings who take a special interest in men, are very much concerned with men. Now but examine that. You say that the gods are a species of living beings who care for men. You do not know that. Very profound studies would be needed to prove such beings care for men. But there is one species of living beings which is empirically known to everyone as caring for men. One species only. And what is that? It's really in itself an extraordinary fact: the dogs. The dogs are the only species who take to men in that way. That's strange. I think that is part of the story—part; I don't know whether that is the whole.

Now Socrates turns to the poets, but to what kind of poets? To the poets of tragedies, and of dithyrambs, and the others. Well, in a way he means of course all poets, but it is very remarkable that he does not mention here the comic poets. Now what about the wisdom of the poets, which was much more admirable than that of the politicians? What did we see here? Now let us read that: “take up their poems which seemed to be most carefully made by them.” Yes?

### Reader:

I used to pick up what I thought were some of their most perfect works and question them closely about the meaning of what they had written, in the hope of incidentally enlarging my own knowledge. Well, gentlemen, I hesitate to tell you the truth, but it must be told. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any of the bystanders could have explained those poems better than their actual authors. So I soon made up my mind about the poets too: I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled them to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration—

<sup>v</sup> *Lysis* 211e. Presumably Strauss's translation.

<sup>vi</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2. 7.13-14.

**LS:** Yes. “By some nature,” more literally translated. “By some nature and god-possessed.” Yes?

**Reader:**

such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean. It seemed clear to me that the poets were in much the same case; and I also observed that the very fact that they were poets made them think that they had a perfect understanding of all other subjects, of which they were totally ignorant. So I left that line of inquiry too with the same sense of advantage that I had felt in the case of the politicians. (22b-c)

**LS:** Ya. The poets understand their own doings less than the hearers. The poets work not by wisdom, but by some nature and inspiration. Like whom? Like some other human beings.

**Student:** Priests?

**LS:** Ya. Priests—not exactly, but like the soothsayers and like the Pythia. You remember, Chaerephon hadn’t heard this from Apollo: he had heard it from the Pythia.<sup>19</sup> By believing in the oracle, Socrates believes in the utterances of an unwise being, because what is true of the poets is true of the prophetess in Delphi too. Yet he examines these utterances of an unwise being. This is his wisdom. He is wiser than the Pythia, than the oracle. The result of all these things is that Socrates is hated and envied, but also—that’s always the other side of it—a certain feeling of superiority on Socrates’s side. He’s free from that delusion himself. You see, the poets’ examination is<sup>20</sup> the central part, and it is quite clear why this is the central part: because it throws light on the problem of the oracle, and the oracle is the starting point of the whole thing.

Now the third stage: the artisans; the manual workers, one could almost [say]. What happened there? They possess knowledge. The shoemaker knows why he does what he does, whereas the poet according to this description does not know what he does. But they believe that they are wise in the greatest things, and there they are absolutely wrong. They have a limited wisdom, but they claim to be simply wise and that they are not. Now this passage—this is third sentence: “But, O Athenians, they seemed to me to have the same defect as the poets.” Do you have that?

**Reader:**

But, gentlemen, each professional expert seemed to share the same failings which I had noticed in the poets; I mean— (22d)

**LS:** No, no. That is not correct. There is something else. It’s “the poets and the good craftsmen.” He omitted that. The good craftsmen. He spoke here,<sup>21</sup> let us say, of the manual artisans, if I may try to bring out the meaning of the Greek term. And now he says these men seem to have the same effect as the poets and the good craftsmen. Who are these good craftsmen? But the Greek word,<sup>22</sup> which I have said, you know,<sup>23</sup> in passing, *dēmiourgoi*—I write rather the singular, *dēmiourgos* [LS writes on the blackboard]—that is also used for craftsmen, but it has a wider meaning. So it can also be used in the sense of magistrates. Literally, it means something like the people who work in the multitude, in the *dēmos*, but these are not only the shoemakers; they are also the magistrates. And you only have to look up in Liddell and Scott this word—the English-

Greek dictionary—to see that this is a term in the sense [of] magistrate. The meaning of magistrate occurs in Thucydides and in other classical writers, to say nothing of inscriptions. Now<sup>24</sup> the politicians too are a kind of craftsmen. The politicians too have a *technē*, an art: the good one. But what Socrates says here is also implied. Just as Socrates lacks the wisdom of the astronomers and he lacks the wisdom of the educators, he also lacks the wisdom of the statesman. That's important. And [it is] needless to say that he lacks the wisdom of the craftsman in the simple sense that he's not a shoemaker, and so on.

All these men, even the good statesmen, have some wisdom, but not the wisdom regarding the highest things. Many Athenians are wiser than Socrates. They all know, they all have a sphere in which they are competent, in which they can give reasons why they do what they do. But these Athenians are wiser than Socrates in partial things, in little things. He is wiser than all Athenians in the *greatest* things, because he knows that he has no knowledge of them. But don't overlook the claim which Socrates makes while being prosecuted for a capital crime: I am wiser, he says, than all of you. Imagine this insolence! Therefore, as Xenophon puts it,<sup>25</sup> Socrates's defense speech was famous because of the big mouth, one could almost translate, which he had: *megalegoria*, which is a derogatory term for talking big, to talk big. He was talking big.

So he does not flatter his accusers or judges.<sup>26</sup> This is the end of the examination. I mentioned last time that Socrates did not examine the astronomers and the sophists (at least not according to this report), the people for one of whom he could be mistaken. Why did he not examine them? The oracle, of course. The Delphic god, by implication, denies the wisdom of the astronomers and the sophists by saying no one is wiser than Socrates. But the verdict of the Delphian god cannot be accepted without examination, as we have seen, and in this most important respect the oracle was not examined. If we knew only the *Apology*, and the simple listener, the intelligent listener to Socrates's defense knew only the *Apology*—no writings of Socrates, and they had never talked to him—this really must be bewildering, this point.<sup>27</sup>

I repeat then the question: What is the content of Socrates's wisdom? Let us read the answer which he gives in the immediate sequel, 23a5: "But in this respect the god seems in truth to be wise." Yes? Do you have that? "And in this oracle to make this assertion, that human wisdom is of little or no worth." Do you have that?

### **Reader:**

But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this: that real wisdom is the property of God, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value. It seems to me that he is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he would say to us, "The wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect to wisdom he is really worthless."

**LS:** Yes. So Socrates possesses human wisdom, i.e., wisdom of little or no value. This human wisdom is distinguished from wisdom proper, which would be superhuman, as either the gods have it or the astronomers and sophists may have it, for all we know. Yet to become aware of this ignorance regarding the greatest things and to make others aware of it is service to the god, as is said in the immediate sequel. Is service to the god. Now we could read this up to this point as follows: human wisdom is identical with humility, but on the other hand, lest we



misunderstand this sentence in a biblical sense, humility is nothing to be proud of, if I may express myself a bit comically or contradictorily, if you want. In other words, this humility is simply sobriety, to be aware of your ignorance. But then Socrates uses a somewhat different expression. Let us read the immediate sequel where we left off.

**Reader:**

That is why I still go about seeking and searching in obedience to the divine command, if I think that anyone is wise, whether citizen or stranger.

**LS:** You see, there is here a passing reference to these strangers, which would include Gorgias and Protagoras and these people, but nothing is said about . . . Ya?

**Reader:**

And when I think that any person is not wise, I try to help the cause of God by proving that he is not. (23a-b)

**LS:** Ya, more literally, “I assist the god,” “I come to the help of the god.” That is important. This service to the god is an *assistance* to the god. Now as an assistance to the god, it is of course something to be proud of. Not everyone can assist Apollo. Why does the god need assistance? Why does he need it? I mean, the answer is in what we have seen before. We had here a practical example before, of why Apollo needs assistance. He needs no assistance for inspiring the Pythia. Ya? I mean, that he takes care of. But once the Pythia has spoken, what happens next? The oracles were famous for their ambiguity, for their obscurity, for their lack of clarity. The god cannot produce that or will not produce that, but the men need clarity and this is done by a human examination. In this sense, the god needs assistance. Yes?

**Student:** Is it not that Socrates is using the oracle? Could it not be interpreted as simply Socrates’s irony towards the audience here? On the one hand he’s being tried for impiety, and on the other hand he claims that everything he does is the expression of his duty to the god.

**LS:** You are, I think, a hundred—no, ninety-nine percent correct. You see, let me state this as clearly as I can. In a strict sense, everything is ironic in a Platonic dialogue. Ironic doesn’t mean sneering or—you know, this kind of thing. What does irony mean, originally? We have to go back to the original meaning. Originally, simply a device: it means dissimulation. And it is applied—I wonder if it is applied in the *Clouds*, or is it in another comic fragment; I don’t know<sup>vii</sup>—to Socrates. But then it acquires, through Socrates . . . good meaning. Dissimulation has a good meaning if there is a noble dissimulation. Now in this sense the word is used by Aristotle when he speaks of the magnanimous man in the *Ethics*. A magnanimous man is ironical toward the many. What does this mean?<sup>28</sup> The magnanimous man as Aristotle defined it is a man who possesses all virtues and is aware of them. So the magnanimous man is a man of noble pride about his achievements, you can say. But when speaking to the many, to people without

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<sup>vii</sup> Aristophanes uses the term *eirōn* at *Clouds*, line 449, in the mouth of Strepsiades, but not with reference to Socrates. Perhaps Strauss means Alcibiades’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, at *Symp.* 216e. For a fuller consideration of Socratic irony and Socrates as *eirōn*, see Joseph A. Dane, *The Critical Mythology of Irony* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991), part 1.

achievements, he dissembles his superiority.<sup>viii</sup> That is his humanity. So noble dissimulation means to dissimulate one's superiority. It does not consist in saying to a man who is blind, "What wonderful eyes you have"<sup>29</sup>—or a man has any other defect, to . . . But it is dissimulation of superiority on the part of superior men.

Now that applies especially to that kind of superiority which the ancient thinkers regarded as the highest, namely, to wisdom. Irony in the Socratic sense is dissembling one's wisdom in the sense of one's superiority. But what does it mean to dissemble one's wisdom? To present oneself as less intelligent than one is. And that of course is what Socrates, in a way, does—I mean, the famous story is "I don't know." And Socrates asks questions, never answers them, these famous stories. That is irony in one way. But<sup>30</sup> one must see the background of this, of the humanity in it. And whenever Socrates speaks to anyone in the dialogues, he speaks with a view to what the other fellow can understand or what will be useful to that other fellow. That is the irony. Now if this is fundamental irony, everything is ironic. Therefore<sup>31</sup>—now can you repeat your statement, Mr. Faulkner?

**Mr. Faulkner:** I think I stated or implied that his use of the oracle was in a way simply a joke on the Athenian people.

**LS:** Yes, sure, sure. I mean, that is clear.<sup>32</sup> I find it that way. But that doesn't dispose of the problem, because you have only to generalize that. You have here an unwise saying, <sup>33</sup>I mean a saying going back to a human being who did not know what she was saying. Yes? And this proves to be wiser than she could have thought. Ya, but is this not so—I mean, let's generalize. Let's forget about the oracle: Is this not our human situation regarding knowledge altogether if you generalize that? We are disposed to certain things. Opinions are embodied in our institutions, in our problems, in the very terms of our language. Ya?<sup>34</sup> And the language doesn't know why and the opinions don't know why. But then they prove<sup>35</sup> to make sense on examination. All our attempts at knowledge are preceded by opinions which we have not made, and which are not fully wise because they don't know why, but which embody wisdom.

I mean, to come to present-day knowledge: replace for one moment the oracle by tradition. Socrates does not accept traditions in this sense, but he doesn't reject them either. They contain some wisdom, and perhaps much wisdom; that depends on what kind of tradition. So I think we have to take this more seriously. I mean,<sup>36</sup> that Socrates did not believe<sup>37</sup> the Pythia and Apollo, I would take that for granted, and so. But it is<sup>38</sup> not a merely joking case. In Plato's seriousness, there is always playfulness, but also vice versa: in all his playfulness, there is seriousness. I mean<sup>39</sup> the apology, a very solemn thing, is in a way grotesque comedy. You can isolate the comedy, ya?, very easily: that Socrates here doesn't refute the charge, and then in a way he tells them: What you know about me from Aristophanes—I mean, if you read it with some care—that is all true, except Strepsiades. I never did such a foolish thing. Only it is no longer true now; that I did when I was much younger.<sup>40</sup> This is in a way suggested, and many other things: the whole conversation with Meletus, I mean that is simple comedy. You know,<sup>41</sup> the accusation is self-contradictory. He doesn't even have to prove that he believes in the gods, because the accusation

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<sup>viii</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3.14-33, 1123b-1125a, and esp. 4.3.28, 1124b. For *eirōneia*, see also *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.7.12, 1108a.

admits that he believes in the gods. Ya? And so on. But on the other hand, the playful is also not merely playful. Therefore it is never sufficient to say it's ironical. Never. Yes?

**Miss Hill:** I have a question. It says "god." In my book it's singular. Now in the translation,<sup>42</sup> should it be "gods," or does he refer to it as "god?"

**LS:** Yes, that's a very good point and a very important point. Now there are people who would, and I believe most of them would translate in their translation, when god occurs in the singular, God with a capital G, and when it occurs in the plural, of course gods with a small g. Yes, that is misleading, because this distinction as we know it through the biblical tradition, between the one true God and the many false gods, is of course not a Greek distinction in this way. Ya? I mean, even those who were in a way monotheists, like Plato, admitted also other gods. I mean, they were not simply monotheists—I mean, they didn't accept Zeus and Hera, but they had the stars, for example. Therefore I think that the Greek word, when it occurs—*ho theos*, "the god"<sup>43</sup>—that may mean and means in many cases that particular god we are speaking about: Apollo. Therefore one should translate it—I mean, in the perfect translation, which of course doesn't exist, it would have to be translated "the god" with a small g. And of course it may also be without the article; then I would translate it "a god." Also write it without a capital G, not suggest more than the text really says. "The god" could also be the highest god, the ruler of the universe. That could very well be. That depends on the context. But "the god" may very well mean the god in question. You know, on some occasions it may be Apollo, in other cases it may be Dionysus or whoever it may be. Yes?

**Student:** . . . how does he know that he should assist the god and point out to others that they're not wise? Isn't it enough just to find out that they aren't wise without pointing it out to them, when in pointing it out to them he's arousing their enmity?

**LS:** He takes up that question later. In other words, that belongs to that broad question toward which I'm working my way: What does Socrates know? How can he live if, as he claims, he does not know anything? I mean, the fact that he knows that he's an Athenian citizen does not even prove that he should obey the laws of Athens, because there is still the question: Should one obey the laws?<sup>44</sup> But I'll answer your question as you stated it. How does he know? He knows, believes that the god must say the truth. Ya? It is not right for you to lie, he says. But what the god says, literally, as he understands it, is manifestly not true<sup>45</sup>—as far as he knows—that he should be wise. And he wants to find out. You can say it is a mere curiosity with him. But by the examination the god proves to be right, the prestige of the god increases, and he has a feeling that this means this obscure and apparently absurd statement, that Socrates is wiser than the others, is true; and therefore it includes an incentive, an injunction to Socrates always to go through that process by which the god's hidden wisdom becomes manifest. And that is what he did.

**Same Student:** Well, need he point out to others that they are unwise, that they are not wise?

**LS:** Okay, fine. Generally, you see, that is so. He is not concerned with others. He is concerned with the god and him, but he cannot find out the truth of the god's statement, "Socrates is wiser than the others," except by looking at the others and finding out by conversations with them that they are less wise.

**Same Student:** But what I mean is, can't he examine them and talk to them, and thereby prove [their lack of wisdom] to himself, without then going outright and telling them whether they don't know what—

**LS:** No, he doesn't have to tell them. It is very sufficient. They say something: I know it is absolutely true. And then he responds: How do you know? What are your reasons? And then Socrates says: Well, let's look at these reasons. Reason number<sup>46</sup> [A] is wrong, reason number B is wrong, reason number C is wrong. So if he would be perfectly silent at that point . . . [laughter] humiliated, then Socrates would become "quote unpopular unquote" with that man.<sup>47</sup> That cannot be avoided. I mean, as a very misanthropic man once said—Hobbes: "To disagree with a man means tacitly to accuse him of ignorance."<sup>ix</sup> [Laughter] And you would be surprised how very perceptive and sensitive many people who otherwise are not perceptive at all are in this matter. That is vulgarly known as vanity, but that is unfortunately a part of the human scene.

**Same Student:** But if we leave aside for a second the possibility, that the people who convict Socrates have been hurt by him and want to get back at him, isn't it quite possible that Socrates has misread the knowledge level of the audience in the sense that he either overrates them or underrates them? In fact, his irony is discovered: it's not irony, it's actually sarcasm. I mean, last semester we were talking about this in the other dialogue.<sup>x</sup> When the other person realizes that it's irony on your part, it becomes sarcasm and insolence.

**LS:** Insolence. Insolence, ya, sure. Yes, but then what would follow? That Socrates would not dispose of the enmity, of the hatred of him. He would even confirm it and perhaps increase it. Ya? That seems to have happened. And that would raise the question:<sup>48</sup> is Socrates not responsible for his own condemnation? But<sup>49</sup> that is a moot question, because on the other hand, is it not so that Socrates tells them in a language which they can understand, "I cannot live differently than I live?" That is what he says, and I believe it is literally true. He could not live differently than he lived, and since his way of life created the hatred, he had to bear the consequences. We come to that later.

Now Socrates's service or assistance to the god has the consequence that Socrates has no political, no domestic activity—he has no time—and hence he lives "in ten-thousand-fold poverty."<sup>xi50</sup> He uses this suggestion of very great wealth, ten thousand, in order to bring out—how could I do that in English? I don't know a good English parallel to that, "in ten-thousand-fold poverty."

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<sup>ix</sup> Thomas Hobbes, "*De Cive*." *Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis opera philosophica quae latine scripsit omnia: in unum corpus nunc primum collecta studio et labore*, vol. 2, ed. Gulielmi Molesworth (Londini: Joannem Bohn, 1839-1845), 162 (1.5). Likely Strauss's translation or paraphrase. Strauss may also have in mind *Leviathan*, chapter 10, at sec. 30: "To agree with in opinion is to honour, as being a sign of approving his judgment and wisdom. To dissent is dishonour, and an upbraiding of error, and (if the dissent be in many things) of folly."

<sup>x</sup> The *Symposium*.

<sup>xi</sup> Plato, *Apology* 23b-c. Strauss's translation.

**Student:** A college professor?

**LS:** Yes, it would be that! [Laughter] Sure. Some of them live even in much-less-fold poverty. I mean, some get much less than ten thousand [dollars], as you can see from the statistics. [Laughter]<sup>51</sup> You could say, perhaps, he lives in one of the highest poverty brackets in the country. And that is very strange. Although he lives as such a poor man, his companions are the sons of the wealthiest. Ya? Of the wealthiest men. This, incidentally, answers a simple question which we must be realistic enough to raise: What were the sources of Socrates's livelihood? Although he didn't work, he didn't ignore that he had to live. An absolutely proper question, it seems to me. And I think it is answered most beautifully in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, which deals with economics—with private economics, that is—and therefore, since Socrates is a teacher of economics, we have of course to apply the question to him. And I think the answer is<sup>52</sup> [in] a brief discussion at the beginning, where they say, "What is money? What is property?" and by virtue of a very sophisticated definition of property, they arrive at the conclusion that friends may be money.<sup>xii</sup> That was Socrates's money. He has these wealthy people.

Now being young men and wealthy, they were of course insolent. Ya? That is a common experience, I mean, with good breeding, externally, but—. <sup>53</sup> And they of course made Socrates the more hated, because they thought it was very great fun to go to a pompous ass, and with all decorations and dignities, and then to show him up. Well, it redounded to Socrates's unpopularity. You remember the previous statement about the older comrade of Socrates, Chaerephon, who was a friend of the multitude:<sup>54</sup> that's a different generation. The consequence of this story, that Socrates was accompanied by these young and wealthy men, is that he corrupted the young, because these dignitaries naturally didn't think that this was the right thing to do but [that] it was a corruption.

Now in this connection, the calumny against Socrates is reformulated in 23d5 to 7. Yes, these unmasked men say<sup>55</sup>—because they can't possibly say, "He has found me out," so they must calumniate Socrates<sup>56</sup>—what is generally said "about all philosophers, namely, things aloft, and those under the earth, and not believing in the gods, and making the weaker speech stronger."<sup>xiii</sup> You see, not believing in the gods is now in the center.<sup>57</sup> We will see that this is the crucial issue later. And then he speaks of the three accusers by name: Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon. Meletus spoke for the poets, "was angry on behalf of the poets; Anytus was angry on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians; and Lycon [was angry] on behalf of the orators."<sup>xiv58</sup> So the orators are now added, as you see, and the artisans and politicians<sup>59</sup> are represented by one and the same man.<sup>60</sup> Both artisans and politicians have to do with the *dēmos*. Either they belong to the *dēmos*, as the artisans proper, or they work in the *dēmos* or on the *dēmos*, the politicians. Anytus is in the middle. He seems to have been the most important of the three, as is shown also by the dialogue *Meno*.

Now then Socrates turns to the defense against the present accusers. Then he quotes the formal charge. Do you have that, in 24b? "Now let us take the charge," this charge made against him. Do you have that?

<sup>xii</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 1.14.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Apology* 23d. Strauss's translation.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Apology* 23e. Strauss's translation.

**Reader:**

I shall now try to defend myself against Meletus—high-principled and patriotic as he claims to be—and after that against the rest.

Let us first consider their deposition again, as though it represented a fresh prosecution. It runs something like this—

**LS:** You see, “something like this.” Ya?

**Reader:**

“Socrates is guilty of corrupting the minds of the young, and of believing in deities of his own invention instead of the gods recognized by the State.”

**LS:** Literally, “not believing in the gods which the city recognizes” or “believes, but other strange, demonic things.” Yes?

**Reader:**

Such is the charge; let us examine its— (24b-c)

**LS:** Yes, “such,” not “this.” You see, Plato makes it clear by the references before and after that the charge is not quoted literally.<sup>61</sup> By a fortunate accident, the literal version of the charge has been preserved in Diogenes Laertius. Xenophon too does not quote the charge literally, but Xenophon makes very minor, almost invisible, changes. Plato makes very big changes. In the true charge, the charge of impiety comes first, before the charge of corruption. And secondly, Plato omits one word, namely, in the charge it is “not believing in the gods in which the city believes,” but “*introducing* other new divinities.”<sup>xv</sup> This “introducing” is dropped by Plato. Good. Whatever that may mean.

Now we come to the corruption charge, which he takes up in the first place. Socrates corrupts the young. He makes the young worse. That makes sense only if there are people who make the young better. “What makes the young better?” asks Socrates. Answer, first, the answer of Meletus, 24d, end: The laws. Sure. Socrates does not question that. But what does he answer to that, the question about the laws? “But this is not what I ask, my best, but which human being, who in the first place knows this very thing, namely the laws.”<sup>xvi</sup> Yes? Why is the answer, “The laws,” not sufficient? Socrates does not question the proposition that the laws make men better, make the young better. What does this mean, this transition? Why does he appeal from the laws to human beings? Or even a single human being? Yes?

**Student:** The laws are conventional, it may be, but people—

**LS:** Yes,<sup>62</sup> that is very good. But that is not said here.<sup>63</sup> We must begin from what he explicitly says. He doesn’t speak of the making of the laws but of the knowing of the laws. Now what he’s suggesting is the laws become effective on the young only by human beings who act in

<sup>xv</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 2.40.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Apology* 24e. Strauss’s translation.

accordance with the laws, and therefore who know these laws. Ya? The question of the laws as an authority goes through the work, as we shall see later, but it is not the theme. It becomes the theme in the *Crito*,<sup>64</sup> which we will read afterwards.

Ya, who are then the human beings who make the young better? And Meletus gives an answer which is in accordance with this democracy, as then understood: “Everyone!” The judges, the jurymen, the men in the assembly, and so on and so on; the men in the council. All Athenian citizens are good educators. Let us consider that for one moment. To accuse someone of corrupting, of making certain things worse, means that I know what is good. Otherwise, the charge makes no sense. Meletus claims as a matter of course that he knows what is good. And he implies that it is easy to know it. Everyone—all Athenians—knows it. Perhaps he means even [that] all men know it.<sup>65</sup> Now how could all men know what is good?<sup>xvii</sup> —implies the rejection of this notion. There is no naturally available knowledge of good. It may be acquired, but it not by nature available. There is by nature available something like a divination of the good. That’s surely what Plato means. But this divination is not knowledge, and therefore you can in no way rely on it.<sup>66</sup>

You remember Socrates’s previous assertion about his wisdom, which implied that he did not know what is the good. He is ignorant about the greatest thing. But he also doubts whether what the Athenians believe to be good is good, because he knows that the Athenians do not know. He doubts whether the Athenians know what is the good, and he spreads this doubt by making it clear to everyone that he doesn’t know. That is corruption. To that extent, Socrates proves the charge of corruption from the Athenian point of view. The question is whether there is not a higher point of view. But the question is also whether this higher point of view can be brought out in a popular speech except by reference to the [oracle of] Apollo. Now what is Socrates’s main argument against the assertion “All Athenians know what is good,” a typically Socratic example which goes through all these kinds of discussions? In all fields of knowledge, there are only a few who know. Experts are rare in every field.<sup>67</sup> Knowledge is expert knowledge. Hence expert knowledge regarding good and bad, the only genuine knowledge, is also rare.

Now you see that this is confirmed by another feature which we have observed which you may very well call ironical, but as we have seen before, the ironical things have to be taken as seriously as the nonironical things. Since in all fields there are only a few who know, Socrates, with perfect consistency, sends people to the professional educators, to the sophists. On this basis, inevitable. Still, whatever this knowledge may be which Gorgias and such people possess, Socrates does not possess that knowledge of the good. So let us keep this in mind.<sup>68</sup> Socrates’s wisdom, knowledge of his ignorance, includes as such ignorance of the good. How can he live? I repeat that. Let’s keep this question always in mind.

Now let us turn—we cannot possibly read the whole—to 25c5, where he says to Meletus: “Now tell us, by Zeus, Meletus, whether it is better to live among good citizens or wicked citizens.” Do you have that?

### Reader:

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<sup>xvii</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

Here is another point. Tell me seriously, Meletus, is it better to live in a good or in a bad community? Answer my question, like a good fellow; there is nothing difficult about it. Is it not true that wicked people have a bad effect upon those with whom they are in the closest contact, and that good people have a good effect? “Quite true.” Is there anyone who prefers to be harmed rather than benefited by his associates? Answer me, my good man; the law commands you to answer. Is there anyone who prefers to be harmed? “Of course not.” Well, then, when you summon me before this court for corrupting the young and making their characters worse, do you mean that I do so intentionally or unintentionally? “I mean intentionally.” Why, Meletus, are you at your age so much wiser than I at mine? You have discovered that bad people always have a bad effect, and good people a good effect, upon their nearest neighbors; am I so hopelessly ignorant as not even to realize that by spoiling the character of one of my companions I shall run the risk of getting some harm from him? because nothing else would make me commit this great offence intentionally. No, I do not believe it, Meletus, and I do not suppose that anyone else does. Either I have not a bad influence, or it is unintentional; so that in either case your accusation is false. And if I unintentionally have a bad influence, the correct procedure in cases of such involuntary misdemeanours is not to summon the culprit before this court, but to take him aside privately for instruction and reproof; because obviously if my eyes are opened, I shall stop doing what I do not intend to do. (25c-26a)

**LS:** Ya, let us stop here. What Socrates says here is this: the charge is groundless. Groundless. Why? Because no one corrupts willingly, for no one wishes to be harmed. Everyone wishes to be benefited, but the good benefit and the bad harm. No one wishes to make others bad. No one wishes to corrupt others. So if Socrates corrupts others, he does it unintentionally. Socrates goes beyond that: if *anyone* corrupts anyone, he does it unintentionally. What is the consequence? Yes?

**Student:** Well, the law then would be meaningless.

**LS:** Absolutely, absolutely. Punishment is unjustified because, as we can easily enlarge that and prove it from other dialogues, the thesis of Socrates was: All sinning is involuntary. And involuntary sinning is not punishable. This thesis by itself leads to the denial of the legitimacy of punishment. Punishment is an irrational act of revenge, not more, which is of course a terrific assertion. If you are accused of undermining the *polis*, [and] you say such<sup>69</sup> immensely valuable institution[s] as gallows and penitentiaries are irrational institutions, well, you destroy the city as far as it goes. He’s really very extreme. You see, Socrates is in one way very reticent, and very polite, and doesn’t say things which are hard on the ear, but what he in fact says is very harsh, you know, if you have ears for that.<sup>70</sup> Ya, but that is the consequence. The consequence is—you are perfectly right—no one can punish anyone rationally. But there is another thing. Not only the consequence is remarkable, [but] the premise. What is the premise? No one wishes to be harmed. Everyone wishes to be benefited. That presupposes what?

**Student:** It presupposes that people are able to tell what will harm and what will benefit them.

**LS:** Yes, very good. Now to state it more generally, because the implication of benefit and harm is more simple: Everyone knows what good and bad is. Yes? Yes, everyone knows what is good.



But this was denied. Now if we do not know what good and bad are, we cannot teach others, we cannot improve others. Not only is punishment irrational; instruction too is irrational. That is what he means by that. Yes? It's fantastic. But we must really see where we find some ground. We must first look in that abyss.

The conclusion which Socrates draws: Since no one can punish, and no one can instruct in matters of good and bad, and therefore there can also not be corruption in particular, the corruption charge is groundless. Groundless. You see, Socrates doesn't argue the matter out on commonsense grounds here. That's a fantastic thing in such a speech where only common sense would be in order, namely, everyone knew,<sup>71</sup> and knows today what corruption means in a practical way. I mean,<sup>72</sup> if you take Xenophon, who is much more pedestrian in these things than Plato, for example, one thing corrupting the young boys could mean [is] certain sexual misconduct. Xenophon even goes a bit out of his way to show that Socrates was a perfectly decent man in that respect. But it could also mean, for example, other things: to make them bad democrats. That was also discussed by Xenophon—you know, by his relations to Alcibiades and Critias, Socrates had a politically corrupting influence. Socrates doesn't speak of that here at all. He says the corruption charge is groundless, but the grounds of this demonstration are absolutely fantastic. They imply denial of the *polis* and of knowledge in any significant sense.

So now we come to the impiety charge. Let us read the beginning of that. Yes? “Now, men of Athens, this is then clear”—“manifest,” ya?—“what I said, that Meletus has not taken care to be concerned in these matters either much or little,” i.e., not at all. There is a constant joke or pun on the name Meletus that reads like the Greek word for caring: the carer hasn't cared for educating.<sup>73</sup> Now “Nevertheless, tell us, how do you say that I corrupt the young ones?”<sup>xviii</sup> You see, so now we come back to common sense, to the specific charge of corruption. Yes?

**Reader:**

Surely the terms of your indictment make it clear that you accuse me of teaching them to believe in new deities instead of the gods recognized by the State; is not that the teaching of mine which you say has this demoralizing effect? (26b)

**LS:** Oh, that is really bad. Is this the Penguin?

**Same Student:** Yes.

**LS:** I retract my praise. “Is it not by teaching this that I corrupt?” The word corrupt is perfectly clear. In other words, what he does now, that is very important: he reduces the corruption charge to the impiety charge. The real thing is not the corruption charge; the real thing is the charge of impiety. And that is a point which must be stressed because Burnet especially did everything he could to minimize the impiety charge.<sup>xix</sup> The question does no longer concern knowledge. That is important.

But yes, this Greek word which is so hard to translate: *nomizein*. [LS writes on the blackboard] Socrates does not *nomizein* the gods. Now *nomizein*<sup>74</sup> comes from the word *nomos*, but it has in

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<sup>xviii</sup> Plato, *Apology* 26a-b.

<sup>xix</sup> See session 9, note xxxvi.

itself roughly these two relevant meanings: not to worship the gods, and not to believe in the gods. That is indistinguishable when you have<sup>75</sup> such a . . . It becomes distinguishable if it is said that Socrates does not *nomizein* that the gods are. Then you must translate it “does not believe,” you know, because you cannot say, “He does not worship that the gods are.” It has this essential ambiguity. But now the emphasis, as I say, is not knowledge. It is worship and/or believe.<sup>76</sup> Now what—how do you call this? I never know these words: to irritate a fellow so that he makes a statement by which he’s licked, by the making of which he is licked. How do you—

**Student:** To provoke.

**LS:** Provoke, yes. Now Socrates says: Well, do you mean to say that I do not believe in the gods of the city, but in some other gods, you know, of mine? Meletus says: No! No gods at all. You are a straight atheist. So<sup>77</sup> after this point, let us go on. “But, you strange” or “marvelous Meletus!”<sup>xx</sup> Ya? Go on.

**Reader:**

He certainly does—

**LS:** “By Zeus,” he says, “gentlemen of the jury, because he says that the sun is a stone and the moon is earth,” or earthy.<sup>xxi</sup> Ya? What is that? That we must consider. Socrates has a kind of retreat, but he does not retreat. He says, “Granted for a moment that I don’t believe in Zeus and Hera, I would at least believe in the sun and moon as gods”—in what we call the cosmic gods.<sup>78</sup> Some of you may remember our discussion about the *Banquet* where they played such a role. Yes? The cosmic gods: the gods which natural reason perceives to be gods. Self-moving and resplendent beings which everyone thinks are gods: visible gods, manifest gods, the gods which all human beings believe in. And<sup>79</sup> now how does Socrates answer to that?<sup>80</sup> Meletus says no. He says there are no gods: they are just inanimate things, stones and earth. And how does Socrates answer?

**Same Student:** Shall I read?

**LS:** Yes.

**Reader:**

Do you imagine you are prosecuting Anaxagoras, my dear Meletus? Have you so poor an opinion of these gentlemen, and do you assume them to be so illiterate as not to know that the writings of Anaxagoras<sup>xxii</sup> are full of theories like these? and do you seriously suggest that it is from me that the young get these ideas, when they can buy them on occasion at the market-place for a shilling<sup>xxiii</sup> at most, and so have a<sup>xxiv</sup> laugh on Socrates— [Laughter]

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<sup>xx</sup> Plato, *Apology* 26c. Strauss’s paraphrase, then translation.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Apology* 26d. Strauss’s translation.

<sup>xxii</sup> Tredennick has “Anaxagoras of Clazomenae.”

<sup>xxiii</sup> Tredennick has “drachma.”

<sup>xxiv</sup> Tredennick has “the.”

That's the English translation. [Laughter]

**LS:** Yes, well, all right. We can translate it [that way]. Go on.

**Reader:**

if he claims them for his own, to say nothing of their being so silly? Tell me honestly, Meletus, is that your opinion of me? do I believe in no god? "No, none at all; not in the slightest degree." (26d-e)

**LS:** Yes. Both swear, by the way. Socrates swears in his question addressed to Meletus, and Meletus [swears in his answer]. And "by Zeus," each of them.

Now not even the cosmic gods Socrates believes, which all men believe in. Socrates does not prove—that much has become clear—that he believes in the gods in which the city believes, because that had been ruled out. Granted or not granted,<sup>81</sup> the question is now only the cosmic gods. And what does he say regarding the cosmic gods? Well, he uses at least an argument. Ya? And the argument is: I am not Anaxagoras. And Anaxagoras is a fellow who is an atheist, but not I. Ya? Not I. That's all. So in other words, that Socrates believes in the cosmic gods is a bit more plausible, to speak cautiously, than that he believes in the Olympian gods. And then—well, I cannot repeat an argument which I developed at some length when we discussed the *Banquet* last time—Anaxagoras was an atheist. By stating his view in writings, as we've seen, Anaxagoras was corrupting the young, or at least trying to corrupt the young. Ya, but now we know what corruption is, don't we? What does corruption mean now?

**Student:** Impiety.

**LS:** Impiety, ya. But impiety, not believing, and that comes from *nomos*. The standard is the *nomos*. No one knows whether the gods are, and in particular whether sun and moon are not just stones and other inanimate things. The *nomos*, perhaps a kind of universal *nomos*, says so. We must first conclude the discussion of this argument before we turn to a general discussion, if we still have time.

Now how does the argument go on from here? Socrates argues then as follows:<sup>82</sup> You have never heard me say that or write that the sun and moon are inanimate things. With what right can you accuse me of such a thing? You have no leg to stand on. And now Socrates turns the table[s] and says: I can prove to you now that I do believe in the gods of the city, from your own charge . . . Socrates imports or believes in other new daemonic things. That was admitted by the accuser . . . and that is a simple piece of forensic rhetoric: He who believes in horsic things believes that there are horses; he who believes in elephantic things believes that there are elephants; and therefore he who believes in daemonic things believes that there are daemons. Yes? There can't be daemonic things if there are no daemons. Now what are daemons? Daemons are either gods or children of gods.<sup>83</sup> Either way, a man who believes in daemons believes in gods.

But which are the gods who are generated especially by the intercourse of human beings and gods and are more particularly called daemons in contradistinction to gods? Which are these

gods? Sun and moon? No. The Olympian gods. That's it. And Socrates uses the rather blasphemous example of mules. He who admits mules—or asses, as they are called here—admits that there are horses and asses. Therefore someone who believes in beings<sup>84</sup> created by the mixture of gods and men believes that there are gods.<sup>85</sup> In other words, that argument doesn't prove anything. It only proves that Socrates was a much better rhetorician than the man who formulated the charge. The charge of impiety is not refuted in any way. Ya? Not refuted in any way. The only part of the argument which has an element of proof is that regarding the cosmic gods, because this is something which we human beings, meaning all human beings with the exception of some freaks like Anaxagoras, believe in. And so<sup>86</sup> we cannot go beyond that.<sup>87</sup>

So this is the defense. I mean, the other things are a defense of Socrates's way of life—you know, in a justification—but they are not the defense against the charge. That's the refutation of the charge. But that is the least important thing of the *Apology*, although it is by no means negligible. Socrates's whole presentation,<sup>88</sup> which is underlying all through the explicit refutation of the charge, is that his wisdom consists in ignorance, in knowledge of his ignorance. By the way, you see how important this issue of the cosmic gods is. How—I mean, after all, the gravest charge is to be an atheist. It is a less grave charge not to believe in the gods of the city, obviously. Ya?<sup>89</sup> So the graver charge of atheism would mean to deny that even sun and moon are gods. How could a man arrive at this, at this conclusion that the sun is merely a stone? How could he arrive at this conclusion? What would he have to do? Astronomy. What Socrates was accused of doing, you know: walking on the air, and look[ing] around or down on the sun. That was what he was said to have done in the *Clouds*. So the astronomy issue is of course important.

Socrates knows then nothing of the greatest things, neither of the gods nor of the good. How, then, can he live? That's the question. How can he live? Because it is easy<sup>90</sup> to show that every knowledge which he does possess, for example, that he's an Athenian citizen, and married to Xanthippe and what have you, that this does not permit him to live. How should he conduct himself as an Athenian citizen, and as a husband of Xanthippe, and all other things? The guiding questions or the crucial questions he cannot answer. How can he live, as far as we see up to now? What is his wisdom? You know that by now. In what does his wisdom consist, according to his own declaration? Miss Hill?

**Miss Hill:** In knowing what he didn't know. In knowing what he doesn't know.

**LS:** Ya, in knowledge of his ignorance regarding the greatest things. Yes, but all right, what does it lead to, the knowledge of his ignorance? What follows, if he knows that he's ignorant?

**Student:** An attempt to remedy the situation—

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** An attempt to remedy the situation, to acquire—

**LS:** Ya, but let us assume that this is impossible for some reason or another. That appears to be the way in which the issue is stated here. Well?

**Student:** Great caution?

**LS:** Ya. Not to assent. Not to assent. Not to assent to what he does not know. Not to *nomizein*. Ya? Not to believe. Not to believe because he doesn't know. But examine again and again, see whether one cannot perhaps know, and yet probably be led back to the same result. But there is an alternative . . . the investigation. There is an alternative. The first is not *nomizein*. And the other is? The only alternative to not-*nomizein*: *nomizein*! [Laughter] Believing in and accepting the *nomos*. Live by the *nomos*. That is of course partly also, you know, that therefore the oracle and so on. That is not the last word, but we are speaking now only of what has appeared up to now. You want to say something?

**Miss Hill:** Well, I'm not sure I follow you, but to know and to believe, they're not the same thing.

**LS:** No. No, I mean, all right, what is the difference as it has come to light here? That's a very long question, but because this word—I mean, “belief” has here this rather innocent use, you know, when,<sup>91</sup> for example, someone says, “X is in hospital,” [and] I don't believe he is; I have seen him around this morning. You know? That is not a solemn meaning. But believing surely means here to assent to something of which one does not know that it is true. Ya? Knowledge here is used, rather—I mean, not in any technical sense, although the technical sense is not excluded.<sup>92</sup> To repeat, Socrates does of course not say, “I know that I know nothing,” literally understood, because he knows that he's accused, among other things. But he says [that] he is ignorant regarding the most important things, and these most important things are obviously the gods and the good, whatever the relation between the gods and the good may be. Now did I answer your question?

**Miss Hill:** I think so.

**LS:** Yes?

**Student:** To know what he does not know would imply that he knows what it would be like to know something, and I don't understand how these seemingly two statements reconcile with one another.

**LS:** Ya,<sup>93</sup> you are perfectly right. That one would have to go beyond what you said—but, let us first take what you said. In order to say that I know that I do not know, I have to know what knowledge is. Ya. That is true, but is this not also possible: to have a commonsensical knowledge of knowledge as distinguished from a fully developed knowledge of knowledge? I mean this, for example: There is a disagreement about some commonsensical matter, and the other says, “I know it is so. I have seen it.” Ya? Good. I mean, we don't go into a very subtle question how such knowledge is possible through sense perception or so on, but we all understand whether it makes sense. All right. And we also know that there is a kind of legitimate inference, inferring, and reasoning; and without having a developed doctrine of the syllogism, we can see whether someone contradicts himself. You know? And this type of thing. So we can also see that someone makes assertions and that they are formally untenable, like Meletus here, who says Socrates doesn't believe in gods but believes in daemons. Ya? . . . That doesn't require a

very developed epistemology here. You know? But I would go even further to answer your question and say: If I say I do not know the most important things, I know what the most important things are. Ya. That is probably what you meant. But the most important things appear to be the gods and the good. Now can one not prove that these are the most important things? I mean, on the basis of our everyday knowledge, which no sensible man would ever . . . would ever question,<sup>94</sup> can we not prove that? I mean, that is of the utmost importance for human life, for man as a whole, for human life as a whole whether there are or there are not gods.

**Same Student:** But . . . the gods are important? The fact of their being gods or the effect that their being gods has on men?

**LS:** What you take—all right, let us then specify it and say that Socrates doesn't know what is most important for man. And surely, let's forget about the gods—it's complicated—and speak of the good. If you do not know what the good is, you cannot act rationally. I mean, you don't know what to choose. I mean, whether one should not rather commit suicide, or do what this principal did, shooting the . . . is kind of thing . . . if we really are ignorant regarding the good.<sup>95</sup>

**Same Student:** This kind of mores wouldn't seem to be confined to one man only?

**LS:** Ya, but Socrates says—well, [Meletus] <sup>96</sup>says, “All Athenians.” Ya? Now Socrates looks around and asks some Athenian, say, a Greek, a normal citizen: How do you know [this]? Well, ultimately he will tell something: This is how our fathers lived. Ya? And then Socrates can fight and say: Well, your fathers also said certain things about the distance from Athens to Sparta, for example, and we know now that . . . isn't.<sup>97</sup> So the tradition, one can't say that. All right. And then we go on. How does he know? How does he know? And it will prove to be something like traditions of the fathers, and that is not sufficient.<sup>98</sup>

**Same Student:** But the gods, in other words, can prove something that is otherwise unprovable. Or—

**LS:** That would be one way. That would be one way to answer<sup>99</sup> to the question: What is good? [It] can be given only by the gods, and therefore there must be gods. Ya, but still that would have to be established. How do we know that there are gods? Now if the gods are questionable, that means the good would become questionable on that ground, too. But we don't know. How can Socrates live? And up to this point we cannot say more than [that] there is this alternative: either obeying the *nomos*, because [the one] obeying the *nomos* [is one who] claims to know, and who is surely more respectable than any chance human being. Surely, but at least it makes some popular sense. And then the alternative is not to act. And that is what Socrates is going to say immediately after that: I did not act. I mean, he says first “act politically,” but then he enlarges it: He did not act. Well, obviously that cannot be literally true; for example, he married, and he went to the war, and then to the jury, and so on. So that cannot be quite literally true. Ya, but we must face that, because this is a question where—I mean, we see at this point that Socrates knew that difficulty which is now calling us in the social sciences, only it is not—it is much broader, and it is not stated in terms of value judgments . . . but that is implied. Ya? What was the way in which he found out? And somehow it seems up to this point that it was precisely the reflection on his ignorance, on his not knowing, which led him out of the difficulty. Whether that can

become fully clear from the *Apology* we must see, but surely that must become clearer than it is now from the rest of the work. Did I answer your question?

**Same Student:** Well, I think that I—

**LS:** I mean, at least to that extent, that I pointed to the way which we have to take now. Ya.

Ya, so now the question is stated in this work with a very great radicalism: punishment. It is suggested that punishment, if it is to be rational, would of course presuppose knowledge of good. Ya? And instruction also, as distinguished from punishment. You remember the distinction in Aristophanes: remaking people winged by words and by whippings.<sup>xxv</sup> Well, this is the same distinction. Both are impossible means, as rational [means]. Ya, but it goes beyond that. Look at the punitive systems. It is generally assumed that among the punishments which men inflict upon one another, capital punishment is the worst. I mean, I do not wish to go now into the niceties of the gradation among capital punishment—you know, drawing and quartering, and hanging and [laughter]—but let us leave it at the general statement that capital punishment is generally regarded as much worse than a fine, a money fine or something else, or even imprisonment, and so on.

What does this presuppose? Knowledge that life is of much higher value than freedom to circulate, and money, possessions. We presuppose that life is valuable. On reflection, we would perhaps say it is not necessarily the highest value, but it is surely of a very high value, and in all that we do: the tremendous medical establishments are a proof of how highly we value our life . . . know. You know? Towards the end of this book it is suggested that death, being dead, being asleep without dreams, is perhaps better than almost everything which we esteem. But not everything,<sup>100</sup> because if you say, for example, that not life is the highest thing, but virtue, all right, but virtue means of course virtue of a living human being. Or if you take Socrates's special assertion, the philosophic life, the life of examination, is the best, that becomes questionable by this question: Is not death, as dreamless sleep, which is then indistinguishable of course from simple nonbeing—one night, maybe . . . one long night is better than the day. That is better. If that becomes a question, everything is changed into a question; everything<sup>101</sup> becomes questionable.<sup>102</sup> And yet the paradoxical fact is that Socrates in spite of it is dedicated, has dedicated his whole life to what he regarded as the one thing needful, and somehow the ways of knowledge, this human wisdom. And we must try to see what he did, how he succeeded. Mr. Gildin?

**Mr. Gildin:** Did Socrates rest content with a commonsense understanding of what knowledge is any more than he had a commonsense understanding of what a good and evil human being was in the last analysis? I mean, I don't see the steps. You said a tentative answer to this, a tentative answer to this sort of this question, that there was a commonsense understanding of knowledge of ignorance—

**LS:** Ya.

**Mr. Gildin:** which he is not—there is also a commonsense understanding of good and bad.

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<sup>xxv</sup> Aristophanes, *Birds* ll. 1436-1465.

**LS:** Now let me put it this way. I would draw this conclusion from what you say: Would one not have to go beyond that, what I said? Socrates has knowledge—I mean,<sup>103</sup> you see, that is not mere commonsense knowledge. For example, let us take the simple case of Socrates’s refutation of Meletus. Ya? And let us take the statement of Meletus, the charge of Meletus as it stands. [LS raps on the table] That this is self-contradictory and therefore absurd *is* knowledge [LS raps on the table], and no other knowledge which you acquire by studying, say, formal logic and so could improve that knowledge regarding the self-contradictory character of Meletus’s statement. And therefore it is more than commonsense knowledge. The alternative would be this: to say that Socrates does not know that he does not know, but that he only opines that he does not know—that was a line taken by a certain skeptical school in Greece later on, ya?—and Socrates contradicted himself by claiming to *know* his ignorance. Socrates did not contradict himself. And at any rate, that is exactly the difference between Socrates and skepticism, because, as you observe,<sup>104</sup> the fact that some knowledge is possible is admitted by Socrates. That alone can be the cure for his problem. And of course the question would be even to establish that: What are those people who say we do not have any knowledge, the real skeptics? Ya? Is this not a tenable position? And I think that is implied in the work of Plato, not developed in this form but implied throughout, that skepticism proper is impossible. And one only has to look at the simple fact that all skepticism uses arguments to show that we do not know. And these arguments all imply knowledge, very simply. One old doctrine of skepticism is the unreliability of the senses. Ya? They give specimens of that. And they never speak of the errors of our ears regarding sounds and of our eyes regarding colors—I’m sorry, of our eyes regarding sounds and of our ears regarding colors. They know that the hearing has its object sounds, and sight has its object colors, and so on. All skepticism thrives on presupposed knowledge. Whether this is knowledge in the highest sense, that is another matter; I mean, that is a long question, but<sup>105</sup> without it, no possible argument and hence no possible human position of any kind, this thinking.

But<sup>106</sup> what Socrates implies, naturally, and we must see later on whether we can bring this out, is that this knowledge, which no one can reject, does not necessarily give us an indication as to what is good and bad. And that is of course what he said. Ya, ultimately the Socratic argument will have to be a recourse to the nature of man. That is [so]. But we must see to what extent this is clear. The references to it are there from the very beginning, when he uses these homely similes: if you had acquired colts or calves, and now you have acquired sons. Sons are not calves; men are not brutes. That gives us a key: What is good, we mean primarily what is good for man; and what man is and what is characteristic of man<sup>107</sup> is ultimately the basis for the answer for what is good. Ya, I think we must turn to that next time.<sup>xxvi</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted “the first—.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “in other—.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “you—.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “and in order to—.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “of—.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “they know—.”

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<sup>xxvi</sup> The session concludes with plans for the student papers to be delivered at the next session. These comments have been deleted from the transcript.



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<sup>7</sup> Deleted “, but I felt compelled to put my religious.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “the affair of the god—.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “is—.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “most sensible—.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “do not have—they.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “now.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “quite—.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “there is.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “from being—.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “Not—.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “and Aristotle—.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “They are beings—.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “Socrates believes, then—.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “the central part—.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “of the—.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “for—.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “by.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “they all have some—.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “And he mentioned—.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “What—.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “The ironical man—.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “or—I mean, or any—.”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “it is—.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “we have to raise this—.”

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “That is—.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “yes?”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted “You know,.”

<sup>35</sup> Deleted “to have—.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “that is—.”

<sup>37</sup> Deleted “that—.”

<sup>38</sup> Deleted “not a merely joking—.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “this is of course—.”

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “That is—.”

<sup>41</sup> Deleted “that is the poet—.”

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “is—.”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “But how does he—I mean,.”

<sup>45</sup> Deleted “Yes, I mean,.”

<sup>46</sup> Deleted “one.”

<sup>47</sup> Deleted “I mean,.”

<sup>48</sup> Deleted “Did—I mean,.”

<sup>49</sup> Deleted “on the—.”

<sup>50</sup> Deleted “He uses his—.”

<sup>51</sup> Deleted “And—now, yes, he lives in—.”

<sup>52</sup> Deleted “the question—.”

<sup>53</sup> Deleted “, but still—yes.”

<sup>54</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>55</sup> Deleted “that what people say—.”

<sup>56</sup> Deleted “and they say about him what they say—.”

<sup>57</sup> Deleted “because—we come back,.”

<sup>58</sup> Deleted “, of the orators.”

<sup>59</sup> Deleted “are represented by one and—politicians.”

<sup>60</sup> Deleted “Namely,.”

<sup>61</sup> Deleted “Same Student: “Let us examine its—“

<sup>62</sup> Deleted “but—.”

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- 63 Deleted "That—."  
 64 Deleted "where—."  
 65 Deleted "We have—."  
 66 Deleted "Socrates—."  
 67 Deleted "Hence—."  
 68 Deleted "We do not know—."  
 69 Deleted "an."  
 70 Deleted "No—."  
 71 Deleted "what corruption—."  
 72 Deleted "you can even—."  
 73 Deleted "That goes with all the—."  
 74 Deleted ", that."  
 75 Deleted "this—."  
 76 Deleted "Now Socrates—."  
 77 Deleted "now let us—."  
 78 Deleted "You remember—."  
 79 Deleted "Socrates—yes,."  
 80 Deleted "Or how does—."  
 81 Deleted "but that—."  
 82 Deleted "let us—."  
 83 Deleted "In."  
 84 Deleted "mixed—."  
 85 Deleted "That's—."  
 86 Deleted "that—put that onto—."  
 87 Deleted "Now, what is—."  
 88 Deleted "is based—the whole presentation."  
 89 Deleted "Now how—."  
 90 Deleted to say  
 91 Deleted "you say—."  
 92 Deleted "Socrates—."  
 93 Deleted "but is it not—."  
 94 Deleted "and which—."  
 95 Deleted "I mean, you—well—."  
 96 Deleted "Anytus"  
 97 Deleted "That—."  
 98 Deleted "I mean, how—is it—I mean, although this—."  
 99 Deleted ""What is good" may—."  
 100 Deleted "For example—."  
 101 Deleted "is based—."  
 102 Deleted "And yet Socrates—."  
 103 Deleted "let me—there is really—."  
 104 Deleted "that whenever the mere—."  
 105 Deleted "that—it cannot be—."  
 106 Deleted "the question concerns—."  
 107 Deleted "it gives this—."

## Session 11: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —doesn't believe that it solves all questions, naturally, as you would not expect. Now let me see. You<sup>i</sup> said that this section, prior to the condemnation, is the real apology. And I think that is true: that is really the central part of the apology. You rightly noted the provocative character of Socrates. You spoke of insolence. That is also remarkable. I further noted that you made clear an important implication: that it is not only Socrates and the Athenian citizens but the law itself which is ignorant. The law, the *nomos*, itself is ignorant.<sup>1</sup> That is of crucial importance. The other point you made is that there is the difference between the Delphic oracle and Socrates's private voice, as it is called here, the *daimonion*, but you did not go into the question of their relation.

**Student:** Yes, I also did not go into that because I didn't fully understand the relationship, although it seems to be that the *daimonion* is somehow also related to what Socrates initially begins with, the remark when he says the opinions of the people. They somehow . . .

**LS:** Yes, that is of course a question, whether the *daimonion* has anything to do with Socrates's activity as described in the *Apology*.

**Same Student:** Well, I didn't mean to suggest that it necessarily had any connection with the activity, but that it is of somehow the same nature as opinions. There's not—

**LS:** Ya,<sup>2</sup> but before we turn to that, I think one point is very crucial. Socrates does not trace his activity, his talking to the fellow citizens, he does not trace that to his *daimonion*. He traces only his withdrawal from political life proper. That's important.

Then you made the very important and interesting point that the Delphic oracle is not knowledge. Ya? It's just handed down. And Socrates finds out indeed by his examination that it is knowledge, but whether that is what the oracle had said, that's a moot question. Ya. And that the *daimonion* as such is not knowledge, you rightly stress.<sup>3</sup> Also what you said towards the end, that the apology of Socrates is a bridge between Socrates and the *dēmos*, that is, I think, perfectly correct, because the *Apology* is the only utterance of Socrates, of Plato's Socrates, addressed to the citizen body. All other utterances are addressed to individuals, one or more.

One thing I did not understand because you read rather fast, you know? That is how the Delphic oracle was turned by Socrates into a command. You spoke of that more than once, and I find that was a crucial part of your argument. That I did not understand.

**Same Student:** On my understanding, by the act of questioning itself— that is, raising the question, "What is wisdom?"—Socrates, in reflecting on this, saw that the life of wisdom is the proper life of man. In reflecting upon man's nature, he—

**LS:** Ya, but how does it work out? The oracle says no one is wiser than Socrates. And that's a mere assertion, an incredible assertion, in a way, for Socrates. And then, because it is incredible

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<sup>i</sup> Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

and Socrates is<sup>4</sup> a pious man—he says the god can't lie—he tries to find out whether the god did not lie in this particular case, and so he examines it. Well, you could say [that] by restoring his momentarily shaken faith in the veracity of the Delphic god, he fulfilled a religious duty. That one could say. Yes?

**Same Student:** I don't think that's satisfactory, though.

**LS:** Why not?

**Same Student:** Because Socrates really moves to a new level from the examination of the Delphic oracle. The Delphic oracle itself is not wise, but Socrates discovers that he—

**LS:** Yes, but the Pythia, the priestess, is not wise, but Apollo might be wise. And there is a certain pipeline between Apollo and the Pythia. You know?

**Same Student:** I would suggest that really Socrates's new wisdom had nothing to do with the god at all.

**LS:** Ya, but—all right. I mean, I also don't believe that Socrates believed in the Delphic oracle in any way, but still, that is in itself a mere guess. I mean, that needs a long argument. We cannot neglect that, however, <sup>5</sup>because that is said.<sup>6</sup> Yes. But then if he didn't believe in the wisdom of the oracle in the first place, then you would have to restate the question in entirely different terms. I have nothing against that, but you did not do that. Then you cannot say he turned the oracle into something else. You have to give an entirely—a presentation of Socrates's activity<sup>7</sup> in a sentence, so to say, in which the term oracle didn't occur. All right, do that.

**Same Student:** I don't think I can do that, because<sup>8</sup> I'm not sure at all of whether Socrates initially believed in the Delphic oracle in any way at all, and this is not—

**LS:** <sup>9</sup>I think it's a very sensible point—

**Same Student:** But supposing that he did believe in the Delphic oracle initially—

**LS:** And then what?

**Same Student:** And then to examine the Delphic oracle and discover what is meant, in this examination he moves to a different level and finds that the Delphic oracle really is not—

**LS:** All right. Yes, but then<sup>10</sup> let's forget about the Delphic oracle. What is then the motivation of Socrates's activity? What is—

**Same Student:** It's according to the nature of man to do this activity, questioning the act of god.

**LS:** Yes, but have you any basis in the text for saying—

**Same Student:** This, the passage that I quoted, I think to me is the clearest, when he says that he must look to himself first, and to the state before the interests—<sup>ii</sup>

**LS:** Yes, all right, but what is the reason given for being concerned first with oneself and then with the things which one has, possessions and so on—

**Same Student:** So one can somehow understand the nature of man.

**LS:** You see, in a way you are on the right track, of course, but that is not the argument I propose.<sup>11</sup> What is the reason explicitly given, why one should be concerned more with oneself and with oneself being good than with one's things?

**Same Student:** Well, the good of the state, I suppose, in the way that he—

**LS:** Well, in the case of the state, it's the same thing as in the case of the individual, so<sup>12</sup> why should he be more concerned with the soul of the city than with the things of the city? The same as in the case of the individual. What's the reason given?<sup>13</sup> Really, that's very important. Why is it more important to take care of the soul than of the possessions, the explicit reason given? You see, I'm sure that there is a problem in the Delphic oracle, but then if you suggest an alternative, the alternative must have a support in the text and not [be] an intelligent guess. Ya? I mean, you understand my criticism; it is not meant in any harsh way. Now<sup>14</sup> let us now see what is the reason why it is more important to be concerned with the soul than with possessions, and honor and so forth. What's the explicit reason given? Mr. Johnson?

**Mr. Johnson:** He says that from virtue come possessions, and not from possession comes virtue.

**LS:** Good, but what does this mean? . . .

**Mr. Johnson:** On one point, I think it means that any man doesn't get any possessions . . . presupposes civic life, and unless you have some virtue of the city, you can't have any kind of city.

**LS:** No, no, let us forget about the city. Let's appeal to the individual on a sensible—

**Mr. Johnson:** Then on the second point, on the individual, it is a proper harmony that—

**LS:** You are all so sophisticated. Socrates, in the *Apology*, is the opposite of sophisticated: he is simple. What he says is something . . . I mean, this is really practical. What does he say? He talks with someone who is very much concerned with his estate—with his business, what have you—but doesn't care for his soul, and Socrates tells him: But you have to think of your soul first. Something extremely simple.

**Student:** The soul is a possession which continues with him.

**LS:** Yes, but why not state it in practical terms. I mean—

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<sup>ii</sup> Plato, *Apology* 36c.

**Same Student:** The soul is important. [Laughter]

**LS:** Ya, but<sup>15</sup> something much more simple, something terribly pedestrian. There are sometimes people who say, “I wish I had . . . only a hundred thousand dollars.” Ya?

**Same Student:** Well, the state of your soul determines what you will do with your possessions, whether or not you will do good with your possessions.

**LS:** Ya, but very practical, on the lowest level.

**Same Student:** Well, one example of that, you know: when you work all the time.<sup>16</sup> Carry over to Aristotle, and the question of the person who is involved in business activity all the time, where he can get all his possessions, and they’re of no use to him because he puts all his effort into obtaining possessions.

**LS:** Now this, the simple . . . do not understand. Very simple. At first we tell him: In two years, at the latest, you will not have a single cent left because you will have dissipated it. So you must first acquire the habit of frugality, thrift, which is a quality of the soul. Or<sup>17</sup> the other way around also, on acquiring the money: Work hard. Ya? Be industrious—a quality of the soul. So qualities of the soul, virtues, acquire possessions, and the possessions do not make you acquire the virtues . . . to have possessions, and the reason for . . . But what is the defect? What is the reason given for preferring virtue to possessions? Possessions! So virtue is purely instrumental. And this purely instrumental virtue is not the virtue which Socrates ultimately had in mind in the . . . of other virtues. And that is the problem. And therefore—now what was your question which led to these things? Ya, the argument of Socrates in favor of virtue is wholly independent of the Delphic oracle. That doesn’t exist, because it is that argument which has a certain plausibility, but which breaks down on reflection. It is utilitarian virtue, and which makes much sense, you know—how is this formula? “Honesty is the best policy,” ya, and where the question is—it is a good rule, it’s quite true, but it is also very insufficient, because the question is: Is the motivation policy or is the motivation honesty?

In other words, this is an extremely popular speech, the *Apology*, but also an extremely difficult speech, and the reason is very simple. What Socrates is really doing he cannot explain, not because it is subversive or shocking or a similar thing, but [because] the people wouldn’t understand. He must state to them what he is doing in terms intelligible to them. Now that’s impossible. So it can come out only in a caricature. Ya? In a caricature which is very funny, naturally, and at the same time also very sad because, since they don’t understand him, they are practically compelled to condemn him. Yes? Mr. . . .

Now let us then turn to a coherent discussion, and I would like to introduce it with a general statement summing up the points we made last time. Now Socrates’s wisdom, as we have seen, is *human* wisdom, in contradistinction to the superhuman wisdom of the astronomers and so on. And what the astronomers do is indicated by Anaxagoras—you remember the reference—who denied that the sun and the moon, objects of astronomy, are<sup>18</sup> gods. Socrates has nothing to do with that stuff. Socrates knows only that he does not know the greatest things: the stars, gods, the

things beneath the earth—which means of course also the nether world,<sup>19</sup> Hades—and the good. He knows that there are arts, and among them the political art, but he does not possess any of the arts. Yet the arts are not sufficient because they are all based on the assumption that their end, the purpose which they pursue, is good. The shoemaker—the art of the shoemaker is based on the premise that protection of the feet is good. That is linked up with the broader question of protection of the body, protection of life, preservation of life. Well,<sup>20</sup> so that's the theme going through the book. What do we know as to whether life is good? You will never forget the link-up of Socrates's embarrassment with present-day social science. <sup>21</sup>Well, I must plead for forgiveness for this comparison,<sup>22</sup> for a twofold reason, but the merely negative part of this assertion is of course also implied in Socrates: We do not know. We do not know, just as they say we do not know whether social science can say anything as to whether the atomic destruction of the human race is preferable to its preservation, only most people happen to prefer the preservation; and on this kind of market research we build a social science which acts on the premise that . . . preservation is preferable, not in itself. So the arts cannot justify their premise; therefore they are ignorant as such regarding the greatest things. But not only Socrates, but everyone is ignorant regarding the greatest things. How then can he live?

The first answer would be: Knowledge of ignorance means not to assent to anything we do not know, i.e., not believing. Now I'll use the Greek term to make this quite clear, and it is also the punishing word: not *nomizein* [LS writes on the blackboard], which is derivative from *nomos*, law. Not acting on the *nomos*. The other is: No, that you can't act at all if you merely suspend judgment; you *have* to obey the *nomos*. You can live only by believing in this sense, in the simple sense, by acting on the law, by *nomizein*. But that is not the way in which Socrates justifies his way of life. He traces his way of life, as we have seen, to the oracle, and from this point of view his way of life appears a service to the god and even assistance to the god, obviously: he assists the god by proving to all men that in his case, at any rate, the oracle was true, which enhances the prestige of<sup>23</sup> Apollo, and that is an assistance to the god. And this activity consists in examining himself and others, and examining means of course inducing people to suspend judgment. So what happens is that Socrates induces himself and others not to believe, not to assent, on the basis of an assent to the oracle. The difficulty, I believe, is in this point.

But we must hear a distinction,<sup>24</sup> to which Mr. Steintrager alluded. Socrates's knowledge of his ignorance is one thing, and that [he] may have needed in the first stages talking to others, but finally after a few steps he had seen that. Why does he go on all the time to try to convince others of their ignorance? Why is Socrates's knowledge of his ignorance good, so that he spreads that good by convincing others of their ignorance? Why is it better than the alternative, namely, believing to know what one does not know and going on believing to know what one does not know? Now why is that better? And let us forget about the Delphic oracle, because there is really a question there, but why is it in itself better? Why is it better? What does a man do who believes to know while he does not know? Take any case—I mean, take a simple case from your own experience, where you have seen that someone was cocksure about something else and then he was refuted. What happened? What's the reaction of him and the bystanders? Pardon?

**Student:** He makes a mistake.

**LS:** A mistake, ya, but what—

**Same Student:** . . .

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Well, he doesn't achieve his goal.

**LS:** Ya, ya, but I wish only that you would state it more precisely, because we frequently don't reach our goal, and that's not fatal at all. Yes? So why is this other one so fatal? Again, the lowest level is the most proper because there we understand it directly. Yes?

**Student:** He becomes disillusioned, or despairs or . . .

**LS:** Ya, but why should he despair? I mean, why should he despair? What is the precise reason for the despair? I mean, for example, someone says something about Vice President Nixon, and then he's refuted about that; he wouldn't despair, necessarily. [Laughter]<sup>25</sup> But what—yes?

**Student:** He appears ridiculous?

**LS:** Ya, ya, that's a good point, because it comes closer to the issue. But one can of course also say a sensible man does not care particularly whether he's ridiculed or not. After all, that's not the highest criterion. But why is it important? I mean, why is it more than mere fear of the ridicule? It is a very special kind of ridicule. You see, if someone is just, say, plain stupid, that is perhaps deplorable for him or so, or pitiable anyway, but it is not ridiculous in itself. Ya? I mean, only a very callous individual would say that it's ridiculous in itself. But here that's a special kind of ridicule. If someone makes an assertion, he lays a claim to knowledge. By being found out that he does not know, he is condemned by his own standards. In other words, this case is an especially important case of *boasting*. If the stupid man is merely stupid and does his work, it's not ridiculous. But if he boasts, then he becomes ridiculous because he admits [his own standard]. You see, the simple stupid man doesn't recognize the standard of intelligence, you can say. He says: I am what I am. But the man who<sup>26</sup> lays claim to knowledge erects a standard without having been called to do so, and then by that standard he condemns himself. He really contradicts himself in a matter by which he claims to live. Boasting. That is boasting. And boasting in this case,<sup>27</sup> and possibly in all cases, means self-condemnation. Ya? Clear self-condemnation. And therefore boasters are particularly ridiculous people. And this self-condemnation is a self-contradiction. That comes a bit closer to the issue<sup>28</sup> because he says: "I know. <sup>29</sup>I live up to my standard." And he's shown not to live up to his standard.

All right, but why is this examining *others* good? Up to now, we can say he tries to make them nonboasters, or more rightly,<sup>30</sup> not contradicting themselves. The first answer we can say—well, a simple love of human beings, fellow human beings. Ya? I mean, a man who is not vicious wishes to help other people, perhaps not necessarily more than himself, but if he can do it, so to say without going out of his way, he will naturally do it, ya, if he's not vicious. But the explicit reason: <sup>31</sup>the Delphic oracle did not tell Socrates to examine others. So we are still not clear.



Now I will try to explain it<sup>32</sup> in a very impressionistic way, and there is nothing wrong, I believe, with impressionistic remarks, provided one admits it and provided one knows that it is really a disgraceful state that one cannot do more than that. Now when I read the *Apology*, I'm impressed by what I called, impressionistically, the low ceiling: we don't go up—you know, a very low point. And I will try to articulate that a bit. Human wisdom, as defined there, is knowledge of ignorance. But that means, as defined here, knowledge of *nothing* regarding the greatest things. A blank . . . to have that blank in front of you. The ignorant people have that blank, but they don't know it. But you know that you have that blank. Blindness, conscious blindness. The situation described here is not that in the *Apology*, of the blind led by the blind, which is a very sad picture, as you know, but the blind who do not know that they are blind, except one among them who knows it. Now this blind man who knows that he is blind tries to show the others that they are blind too. What's the consequence? I mean, what did they do as long as they did not know that they were blind? I mean it again on the most pedestrian level: think of that simple practical position. They don't know that they are blind. What do they do?

**Student:** Live happily in ignorance.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Live happily in ignorance.

**LS:** Ya, do they live happily? I mean, what happens? They are blind and they don't know it. What do they do?

**Student:** Act in a way which he is not . . .

**LS:** That's so abstract. Ya?

**Student:** They stumble around and they don't know they're stumbling.

**LS:** Exactly. Oh, they feel it. [Laughter] They bump into one another all the time, and into ditches and all kinds of things. Now when the blind man tells them, "You are blind," what's the consequence . . . Well, again, in the simplest case, the simplest formula,<sup>33</sup> they will sit still. They will become paralyzed. They will sit still. Always sit still. Now does this suggest anything to you? Men reduced to a state where they sit still. Did you ever hear men's situation described in terms of sitting still? Pardon?

**Student:** The cave.

**LS:** Can you amplify that remark?

**Same Student:** In the cave, they are stationary.

**LS:** In Plato's symbol of the cave in the *Republic*, ya, men sitting in the cave fettered.<sup>iii</sup> They cannot move. Socrates tries to bring about such a state in which they are not externally fettered,

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<sup>iii</sup> *Republic*, esp. 514a-518b.

but fettered by their negative wisdom, by the knowledge of ignorance. Fine. So it's a good state. But, as is also indicated, since man is supposed to leave the cave,<sup>34</sup> of course it can't be the end. No suggestion of any leaving the cave in the *Apology*.<sup>35</sup> In the *Apology* only they should not run around; they should sit still. What happens then? I mean, a point which is also not unimportant was the cave itself, but let us not go there. What happens? They sit still. No falling into ditches anymore, not bumping into one another anymore, but what happens? Mr. Cohen?

**Mr. Cohen:** The activity of his sitting tends to bore him.

**LS:** Sure, but that is exactly what the cave means, you know. They just talk, they don't fight wars anymore, for example.

**Student:** . . .

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Somebody has to bring in food.

**LS:** Food.

**Same Student:** Yes.

**LS:** Exactly. That is really a practical remark. [Laughter] Because we have to think, they will starve. Sure. Absolutely. That is the suggestion [LS raps on the table] of the *Apology*, because what is your objection to this policy of starving? What would you say? Naturally, you would be exempt. Pardon?

**Student:** I don't want to die; I want to live.

**LS:** You do not want to die! Why do you not want to die?

**Same Student:** On the assumption that life is better than death, or that I don't know—

**LS:** Do you know that?

**Same Student:** No. [Laughter]

**LS:** That is the argument of the *Apology*! The refusing to sit still and starve is based on the alleged knowledge that you know death is an evil. That's interesting. It is very funny, but<sup>36</sup> we must now try to find out what it is. So death is better than life, perhaps. Socrates chooses death, as we have seen, by his very provocative language, [as] you know. But he does not *know* that death is better than life. He knows nothing of the greatest things.<sup>37</sup> He also doesn't know the opposite. And furthermore, which is much graver, Socrates had not always chosen death. He chooses it now. Why? The first answer, again, is the Delphic oracle. His activity, which presupposes of course that he is alive, is a service to the god, and this justifies his relative

clinging to life. It is a duty to live if it is a duty to assist the god. But again, the Delphic oracle did not tell him to examine others.<sup>38</sup>

We are now beginning to read or to discuss the assignment of the day. Socrates is endangering his life. This much has become clear by the end of the Meletus discussion, which we discussed last time. And here a question arises right at the beginning of today's assignment, 28b3 to 5: Is this not *disgraceful*?<sup>iv</sup> Now that's a very strange thing. Why should it be disgraceful to endanger one's life? I mean, to say it is foolish is one thing, but to say it is disgraceful is another thing. That's the straight objection. It would imply that it is noble to save one's life. Now no one since the world exists has ever said that if someone saves his life, by taking the right kind of pills, for example, he commits a noble action. It is useful, but not a noble action. But the emphasis shifts on this question of nobility. Socrates now speaks more emphatically than ever before as a man, *hombre*, to other *hombres*, you know, I can't bring out that in English. The Greeks have a word, *anēr*, which means male human being, ya, like Latin *vir*; and so in English that cannot be brought out, and in Spanish you can bring it out. Socrates speaks as a he-man, you could say, to other he-men, who are concerned with nobility and not with mere usefulness. And he has to teach them the very elements of manliness, which is that life is not the highest good: disgrace is worse than death. In other words, he presents himself as being confronted with people who do not know this element of manliness, who think it is disgraceful not to save one's life, and then he must tell them the first element which everyone knows, from Homer at least, that life is not the highest good. Disgrace is worse than death.

Now then in the sequel, that's in 28b to c, he gives the Homeric example. The demigods<sup>v</sup> in Homer—you remember the demigods, who played such a great role in the discussion with Meletus, ya?, daemons and other intermediate beings as models. They despise death and they regard it as just that one should avenge one's friends. The example is Achilles and Patroclus. That's Socrates's model. Now again, mere opinion: the demigods are higher than human beings, and what they do is surely good, surely noble. The question would be, of course: Does Socrates follow Achilles also by avenging his friends, or<sup>39</sup> has this no meaning? How could Socrates avenge his friends by what he's doing now? Who are his friends? Especially if you would look up the words from the *Iliad* he quotes here,<sup>vi</sup> in the context you would see that Socrates changes the model. Achilles doesn't say a word about [the] justice of his action; that's Socrates's change. Now what is that? How far could Socrates avenge his friends by what he's doing?

An entirely tentative suggestion: Socrates's trial and condemnation led to the consequence that no other philosopher was condemned to death in Athens anymore. He somehow brought about an act of repentance on the part of the city of Athens, and therewith a certain reconciliation; not a complete but a certain—because Aristotle too had to escape. But that may have been due in the case of Aristotle to political problems, you know, because of Macedonia and Philip [and] Alexander. That may have been a different story. But a relative reconciliation between Athens and philosophy was brought about by Socrates's death, because the Athenians repented

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<sup>iv</sup> *Apology* 28b.

<sup>v</sup> Homer, *Iliad* 12.23 is the only Homeric instance of this word (*hēmitheos*, used in the genitive plural *hēmitheōn*), which Socrates uses here (*Apology* 28b-c).

<sup>vi</sup> A conversation between Achilles and his mother Thetis, quoted/paraphrased in *Apology* 28c-d. For the original lines, see Homer, *Iliad* 18.95-104.

afterwards. In other words, Socrates avenges in a way his friends, the other philosophers who had been persecuted in Athens.

Ya, so Socrates compares himself here to Achilles, the seventy year-old Socrates to the youthful Achilles. Ya? That's his model. Do you remember the further fate of Achilles in Homer? You know he was killed by Paris, but then other things happen in the *Odyssey*. Do you remember? You seem to remember?

**Student:** When he says to Odysseus: I'd rather<sup>40</sup> serve as a slave on earth than be king of hell.<sup>vii</sup>

**LS:** King of Hades, in Hades. Ya. So in other words<sup>41</sup>—we know this unfortunately not from Achilles himself but only through the mouth of Odysseus, you know. But still, Odysseus met him in Hades, and there Achilles revoked the whole principle of his heroic life. He said it is better to be a slave in the light of the sun than to be a king among the dead. That<sup>42</sup> we must not forget. But here, on the surface, we see only Socrates taking Achilles as his model. Disgrace is worse than death. But what is disgraceful? Let us turn to 28d6 following. “Thus it is, you men of Athens, in truth.” Ya?

**Reader:**

And this is true, gentlemen, wherever a man places himself, believing it to be the best place, or wherever he has been placed by his captain, there he must stay, as I think, and run any risk there is, calculating neither death nor anything, before disgrace.

Then, gentlemen, I should have been acting strangely, if at Poteidaia and Amphipolis and Delion I stayed where I was posted by the captains whom you had chosen to command me, like anyone else, and risked death; but where God posted me, as I thought and believed, with the duty to be a philosopher and to test myself and others, there I should fear either death or anything else, and desert my post.<sup>viii</sup>

**LS:** Ya, let us stop here. So here, that's the answer. To run away from the enemy, that is disgraceful: the most elementary form of what everyone knows. That's disgraceful. Not to stay where one has been put by one's captains, as he says, but more literally and simply, “by one's rulers.” Ya? There that's clear.<sup>43</sup> And there of course a minor difficulty arises, as is pointed out in the *Laches*: that in some cases it is brave to run away, namely, to lure the enemy into an ambush, for example.<sup>ix</sup> Strictly speaking, to risk their head and so on. Certain difficulties. But let us<sup>44</sup> leave it at the simple notion to stand, [to] stay where one has been put.

But it is noble, in other words, to follow the opinion regarding the best rather than fear for one's life, regardless of whether that opinion of the best is the law—that would mean the rulers—or one's own opinion. That is the conflict. I mean one's own opinion, which can or cannot be traced to the god. Just as when people speak: I follow my conscience and not the law, they mean of course not merely something on the earth but ultimately something divinely sanctioned. That's

<sup>vii</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 11.489-491.

<sup>viii</sup> Plato, “*Apology*” in *Great Dialogues of Plato*. trans. W.H.D. Rouse., ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse (New York: Mentor-New American Library, 1956), 434-435 (28d-29a).

<sup>ix</sup> *Laches* 190e-191c.

the question. There is a possible conflict there. So in other words, we grant that human nobility begins with not clinging to life.<sup>45</sup> If you follow any opinion and regard it as more sacred than your life, you are in principle noble. There is, however, even on this level a possible conflict between two kinds of opinions: the opinion of the community, the *nomos*, or your own opinion. Now what does Socrates say [about] what deserves preference in case of such a conflict between the opinion of the society as expressed in the law and the opinion of the individual? Ya?

**Student:** The law.

**LS:** Is this so? Which opinion of the better does he follow by his life?

**Student:** The law.

**LS:** The law didn't tell him to philosophize. The law did not tell him to philosophize.

**Student:** Then there's no conflict, if the law doesn't tell him to philosophize.

**LS:** Ya, but the law apparently *quasi* forbids it—I mean, forbids it by implication. At any rate, by the way, in this respect I believe that is the ordinary interpretation of the *Apology*, that here a man stands up for the principle that one must stand up for one's own convictions, regardless of what the community thinks. At any rate, Socrates prefers, follows his ruler in the sense of the god, not in the sense of any Athenian magistrate. Well, we are so familiar with this view, and it is extremely interesting that it occurs in a rudimentary form in Socrates. Today one would say one must be loyal to one's conviction. That's what Socrates says, and that alone gives a man nobility. But a crucial implication: just as in the modern view, the conviction<sup>46</sup> to which one must remain loyal cannot be that life is the highest good. Look at the coward. He would say: I follow my conviction. [Laughter] And that is exactly the point: that cannot be a conviction. That's understood.

We moderns have a beautiful word for expressing that, which for deep reasons could not be expressed by the poor Greeks. We speak of *idealists*. The idealists are exactly the people who imply that life cannot be the highest good. And that means of course also possessions and honors and this kind of thing, ya? That is what Socrates seems to express, and that is one reason why this book is so popular and everyone knows it. Ya, an ideal is more sacred than any decision of the citizen body. The whole notion of political crime, and of a respect for the political criminal as distinguished from the common criminal, is of course based on this kind of thing: He didn't shoot this man because he wanted to rob him or because he was jealous of him or so, but<sup>47</sup> it was a political murder. You know that. That's a very important element of modern liberal thought. An idealist, according to this view, is a man who follows a conviction different from any conviction that life and the external goods are the highest good. That is [of course] idealism.<sup>x</sup>

You see where we have sunk today by virtue of the substitution of "value" for ideal. As long as people spoke of ideals—which is also a loose term, but it has a certain respectability—it was excluded that someone could say, "My value is to have four square meals a day." [LS chuckles] That you couldn't possibly say is an ideal, but you can call it a value, easily. You know? That is

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<sup>x</sup> Strauss says "not idealism," which does not seem to make sense in the context.

important. But the trouble is, value is a wholly impossible thing. “Ideals” is also not good enough, and that’s the reason Socrates didn’t speak of ideals. So why is “ideals” not good enough? And simply to say,<sup>48</sup> to repeat this point, human nobility consists in being loyal to one’s convictions, regardless. But conviction in this sense can never mean that life and the external goods are the highest good. Ya?

**Student:** I didn’t quite follow that, because according to the premise under which he’s working, all of his convictions or opinions are merely that, and he can’t further distinguish that one is correct and the other is not correct.

**LS:** That is what I mean.<sup>49</sup> Yes, but you see, it is very important for us to understand Plato, or Socrates, but it is more important for us to understand, for example, such a thing as ideal, ya, what it means. You understand? And we must not completely disregard that. Now why is the concept of ideal as I sketched it—and as it is underlying popular usage, and of course also the learned literature to some extent<sup>50</sup>—a very inadequate notion? Or for that matter, the notion of conviction or of conscience as ordinarily used, why is this inadequate? I mean, it does make a distinction between a brutish life, a life unworthy of a human being, and a nonbrutish life, but why is it so wholly insufficient?

**Student:** Well, this again gets to the problem of justifying the ideal. Unless one can show why the ideal is worth doing things for, this—

**LS:** Yes, it’s too vague. Ya, in other words, what is the criterion,<sup>51</sup> the precise criterion for distinguishing between an ideal and a mere preference? That’s the question. And the difficulty here induced people to abandon the problem and say: Let’s forget about the ideals; let’s speak of preference as preference, i.e., values. That is what happened, which is of course the less desirable thing to do, because if you say an ideal is characterized by the willingness of a man to die for it, that’s obviously insufficient, because people die for all kinds of things. They die even in order to get property, as we know, or for [such] reasons [as] because they are mortified by losing their property, which is also meaning dying for property. It’s really insufficient. So Socrates cannot possibly leave it at that.

In the passage which we read, in 28e4 to 5, the end of [the paragraph], when he says, “the god commanded me” or “put me there, that I must, as I believed as well as assumed,” ya?, “that I ought to live by philosophizing,” and so on. “As I believed and assumed”: that is the basis for Socrates’s dedicated life. It seems that Socrates’s life is based on an opinion. Or does he merely mean that he ascribes his way of life to Apollo is a mere opinion, but the choice of that way of life itself is not? What does he mean by that? What is the basis of Socrates’s high dedication to an ideal? What is the basis of Socrates’s ideal, if we use that term? His conviction that no one knows the greatest things is not opinion, according to the presentation here, but knowledge. That’s a different story. But the connection, the conviction that he ought to examine others: that is not based on knowledge; that is based on the belief that the god has commissioned him to do so. But<sup>52</sup> Socrates’s knowledge that he knows nothing is not the issue, because he would never have been condemned for that, never been accused for that.

Now let us go on where we left off, in 29a: “For it would be awful, and one could then truly and justly bring me into the law court, that I do not believe that gods exist by being disobedient to the oracle, and fearing death, and believing to be wise while not being wise.”<sup>xi</sup> Do you have that? Go on.

**Reader:**

For to fear death, gentlemen, is only to think you are wise when you are not; for it is to think you know what you don’t know. No one knows whether death is really the greatest blessing a man can have, but they fear it is the greatest curse, as if they knew well. Surely this is the objectionable kind of ignorance, to think one knows what one does not know? But in this, gentlemen, here also perhaps I am different from the general run of mankind, and if I should claim to be wiser than someone in something it would be in this, that as I do not know well enough about what happens in the house of Hades, so I do not think I know.

**LS:** Ya, “do not believe that I know.” Let us stop here. Incidentally, you see here he says, “to fear death is to claim to know what one does not know.” We don’t know what happens after death. Death may be a very great good. But we must add, if we read carefully: But it may also be a great evil. We don’t know. What then does Socrates know? You see the paralysis following necessarily from this kind of thing.

One little point which is meant for those who like subtleties: Socrates mentions these three grounds of accusation: (a) that he doesn’t believe in the gods; (b) that he fears death; and<sup>53</sup> [(c)] that he regards himself as wise while [not] being it. The only thing taken up in this sequel is the central one.<sup>54</sup> I mean, that’s one little example:<sup>55</sup> what is in the center is the most important in the context. The question in the context is the status of death. Ya, now the next sentence, where you left off.

**Reader:**

But to do wrong, and to disobey those who are better than myself, whether god or man, that I know to be bad and disgraceful.

**LS:** Ya, now stop. Socrates has knowledge; here we know.<sup>56</sup> Whether death is good or bad, he doesn’t know, but that one must do one’s duty, to say it in a word, that he knows. How does he know? That would be a terribly important thing, naturally, because then he has a guide for everything. “It is evil,” to translate more literally: “It is evil and disgraceful to act unjustly and to disobey one’s betters.” Socrates knows then the most important thing. Like Kant, if anyone has read Kant, we do not know anything about the thing in itself, about true reality, but we know the moral law and that’s all we need. A complete darkness, but one light: the light of the moral law within us. That’s sufficient? Yes, siree, if true. Now one could say, in other words: But Socrates is not Kant; Plato is not Kant, and<sup>57</sup> although many people have tried to equate them, that doesn’t work.

Socrates knows then the most important things, it would seem. One question which we must raise—but it could also be the other way around: that these things which we regard as most

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<sup>xi</sup> *Apology* 29a. Strauss’s translation.

important are not the most important things. Now what could this mean? Now what does it mean to do wrong, as it is translated, *adikein*? What is the most simple meaning of that?

**Student:** To disobey.

**LS:** Whom?

**Same Student:** One's betters.

**LS:** No, no, that is distinguished here. That's distinguished here. What does it mean?

**Student:** To disobey the law.

**LS:** The law, surely. That's always the first thing. Justice means primarily: comply with the law. So to transgress the law; and the other thing is to transgress the verdict of one's betters.<sup>58</sup> That may very well be different from the law, but they may conflict. Which is to be preferred in case of conflict, the decision of the law or the verdict of one's betters? The answer is surely not given here. So we can say this provisionally, and that is perhaps sufficient for the present occasion: this knowledge which Socrates has is less knowledge than a problem. It leads here immediately to a great problem, and that is not completely groundless because a problem means to understand a problem, but it is not the simple guide for life because you are confronted with an alternative and have no key as to the solution. But Socrates seems to indicate a solution in the sequel. Perhaps we read that, where we left off.

**Reader:**

Therefore, in comparison with bad things which I know to be bad, rather will I never fear or flee from what may be blessings for all I know. For<sup>xii</sup> even if you let me go now and refuse to listen to Anytos—you remember what he said; he said that either I ought not to have been brought into court at all, or if I was, that death was the only possible penalty; and why? He told you that if I escaped, your sons “would at once practise what Socrates teaches, and they would all be utterly corrupted.” Then if you were to say to me in answer to this: “We will not this time listen to Anytos, my dear Socrates; we will<sup>xiii</sup> let you go free, but on this condition, that you will no longer spend your time in this search or in philosophy, and if you are caught doing this again, you shall die”—if you should let me go free on these terms which I have mentioned, I should answer you, “Many thanks indeed for your kindness, gentlemen, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I have breath in me, and remain able to do it, I will never cease being a philosopher, and exhorting you, and showing what is in me to any one of you I may meet, by speaking to him in my usual way.” (29a-d)

**LS:** And so on. And then there comes a long speech of Socrates. Now what does this mean? Socrates refuses to accept acquittal under a condition. That's obvious. But this could be formulated much more strictly. They could say: All right, we acquit you, but at the next assembly we are bringing in a bill forbidding to philosophize and defining philosophizing by

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<sup>xii</sup> Rouse has “So.”

<sup>xiii</sup> Rouse omits “will.”



what Socrates does. It would be a law. And what does Socrates then say regarding that law? He will not obey it.<sup>59</sup> So in other words, Socrates gives an answer to the alternative. He says in case of conflict between the law and the commandment of the god, he obeys the commandment of the god. Yes, but then of course that is a difficult thing, because that is not a commandment of the god, as I believe and the Bible could say, quoting chapter and verse. You know? That is a very dubious interpretation of a very dubious oracle. So Socrates simply sets his own conviction against a possible law. Ya?

**Student:** Don't we get another aspect of the answer in terms of his actions, in that he is<sup>60</sup> trying to persuade the citizens he's trying to change the law?

**LS:** Yes, now this whole argument is based on the premise, naturally, that Socrates did not transgress the law. Ya?

**Same Student:** Ya, all right.

**LS:** Ya? Sure. Now I believe that Socrates did in fact transgress the law, because the law [was] forbidding impiety. Yes? That was of course not very clearly formulated, but that was sufficiently large, according to the spirit of the legislator, to cover Socrates's strange things. That's clear. But no, Socrates of course already in his whole complete life . . . <sup>xiv</sup> says: The law is not absolutely sacred for me. So he follows his own conviction. I mean, Socrates would never say that<sup>61</sup> everyone has a right to prefer his convictions to the law. He limits it to certain people like himself, and that is the insolence and provocation of which Mr. Steintrager has spoken. And we must see later whether that is a mere impudence on the part of Socrates, or whether it has a true basis.

But to come back now. Socrates claims to have knowledge; and this knowledge: he knows nothing about whether death is an evil or good, but he knows that one must follow the better. And that implies he knows somehow the good, because otherwise he could not recognize the better as better. We do not know—we have the mere assertion; we have no specimen of it, no proof of it. We must wait for that.

Now Socrates speaks then in the sequel (we cannot read that) of his activity, namely, what he has been doing all the time in Athens. Now<sup>62</sup> the gist of that is this: what he did was to admonish people to virtue, or in other words, he admonished people to take care of their *souls* rather than of anything else. Now what is the basis of that? The command of the god. Ya.<sup>63</sup> So perhaps Socrates's conviction [is] that the best is virtue. The best is virtue, a virtuous life. You note here there is a transition. Previously he had spoken of knowledge of ignorance, which he was spreading. Now he says he's spreading concern with virtue. How does Socrates know that virtue is good? Because that is his knowledge. And the answer we find in the passage to which we have referred before, in 30b. It is somewhat later on. Mr. Johnson, I trust you can find it, ya?<sup>xv</sup>

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<sup>xiv</sup> A section of terribly mangled audio has been deleted here, which the original transcriber determined was created by a splice in the tape. This analysis seems correct. It is difficult to know how many words are missing, but the number is probably not great. This point could also mark the end of the first side of the reel, although this is unlikely. [The tape is at 57:25]

<sup>xv</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

**Mr. Johnson:**

and<sup>64</sup> to care more exceedingly for the soul, to make it as good as possible; and I tell you that virtue comes not from money, but from virtue comes both money and all other good things for mankind, both in private and in public. (30b)

**LS:** Ya, okay.<sup>65</sup> So that is Socrates's knowledge, that he knows. And he doesn't elaborate that, but we can all see that. For example,<sup>xvi</sup> you cannot<sup>66</sup> become rich and remain rich if you are not thrifty and industrious. Ya? Good. And furthermore, you cannot be honored in your city if you do not have certain . . . of the soul, by virtue of which you are elected a congressman and perhaps even a higher rank, such as president. Ya? So virtue is demonstrably the condition of all good. A man who is notoriously nothing but a beachcomber will not get money, honors, or any other external good. That can be demonstrated. If he should get it, it would be by mere accident. Yes, that could be—I mean, he could have fifty different aunts who leave him their money at different times, and whenever he's bankrupt he could [LS laughs]—but that's mere accident. You can't count on that; it's not a rational procedure. So that, it can be proven. But it has one great difficulty, as we pointed out before: virtue is [in this presentation] instrumental. Virtue is instrumental for the external goods, including life itself. Ya, but if that is virtue,<sup>67</sup> it implies a decision of the question of which we were told we cannot decide it, namely?

**Student:** The value of life.

**LS:** Absolutely. Virtue cannot consist in sacrificing life. So in other words, this notion of virtue implies that we know that life is good, better than death. So we are still where we were.<sup>68</sup> In other words, even the commandment of the god, to the extent to which it is an encouragement to virtue, to a virtuous life, implies that life is good because you cannot possibly live virtuously without living.

Now he goes on. Since he does nothing but admonish his fellow citizens to virtue, the Athenians will only hurt themselves, not him, by killing him, for life is not a great good and virtue is a great good. In this connection he also mentions exile as one thing which the Athenians might do, when he says exile is not a great evil. That will play a great role in the discussion of the *Crito*: What about exile? Now here we have to turn again to the text, in 30d7. Now in the next paragraph where we left: "However, he might put me to death, or banish me, or make me outcast." Do you have that?

**Reader:**

However, he might put me to death, or banish me, or make me outcast; perhaps he thinks, perhaps others think, these are great evils, but I do not; I think, rather, that what he is now doing is evil, when he tries unjustly to put a man to death. Now therefore, gentlemen, so far from pleading for my own sake, as one might expect, I plead for your sakes, that you may not offend about God's gift by condemning me. (30d)

**LS:** Yes, let us stop here. "By the god's gift." We have this question: How does Socrates know either that virtue is a greater good than life or that virtue is only instrumental to life and therefore

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<sup>xvi</sup> The tape is scrambled here; it is not possible to know whether words were lost.

inferior to life? How does he know? It is a gift of God that he knows that virtue is a greater good than life or—that is not clear—that he has a capacity to admonish people to virtue.

And then he develops this famous passage—unfortunately we cannot read that—that Socrates is sent<sup>69</sup> by the god to the Athenians as a gadfly. The Greek word for gadfly, *myōps*, means literally closing or contracting the eyes. And<sup>70</sup> that's where mysticism comes from, closing the eyes; and *ōps* is sight. Yes, sight. And therefore that is applied to short-sighted people, as you know,<sup>71</sup> when they wanted to look. Ya? Short-sighted<sup>72</sup> is the primary meaning of the word. Socrates is short-sighted—he's not blind—and we will see later on what that is.<sup>73</sup> So he's sent as a gadfly to the city of Athens. He spends the whole day, wherever he is, in awakening the Athenians as a gadfly. The Athenians would like to spend their whole lives asleep. That is again *the* theme of the *Republic*: life or death. The virtuous life is an awake life, and that's a good life. That's one proposition. Nothing of virtue is instrumental, that is, in itself good. And this is obviously preferable to death, understood as nonbeing and nothing else.

Socrates is sent by the god. His activity is entirely selfless: no instrumental virtue. As he says—ya, I think we should read that: “That I happen to be such a man” or “of such character as to be given by the god to the city, you might be able to recognize from the following point.” Do you have that? He does—ya? Whoever has it reads it. That is 31b.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Reader:**

That I am really one given to you by God you can easily see from this—

**LS:** “From this,” namely, from what follows. Ya?

**Reader:**

for it does not seem human that I have neglected all my own interests, that I have been content with the neglect of my domestic affairs, all these years; while always I was attending to your interests, approaching each of you privately like a father or elder brother and persuading you to care for virtue. And indeed, if I had gained any advantage from this, and taken fees for my advice, there would have been some reason in it—

**LS:** Yes, “it would have been reasonable,” one could say. “It would have been reasonable.”

**Reader:**

but as it is, you see yourselves that my accusers, although accusing me so shamelessly of everything else, had not the effrontery or ability to produce a single witness to testify that I ever exacted or asked for a fee; and I produce, I think, the sufficient witness that I speak the truth, my poverty.

**LS:** Yes. Yes, now listen carefully. Socrates says, in the first place: I did nothing [for myself]; I always did *your* business. Ya? Does this<sup>74</sup> ring a bell? Yes?

**Student:** In the *Republic*, he says minding your own business is the thing.<sup>xviii</sup>

<sup>xvii</sup> The following quotation begins at the end of 31a.

<sup>xviii</sup> *Republic* 433a-d.

**LS:** So<sup>75</sup> if he always did the business of others, how could he find time for<sup>76</sup> minding his own business in the strict sense? His activity is entirely selfless. He is irrational, as he puts it. Ya? “If I had gotten some money for that”—you see, he comes down now to the instrumental value of virtue. Ya? Then it would have<sup>77</sup> made sense. “But I didn’t do that.” The irrationality of his act proves the divine inspiration. A merely human person wouldn’t do that. He takes care of the Athenians like a father takes care of his children. He replaces the fathers. And here<sup>78</sup> there is implied another theme which we know already: by replacing the fathers, by doing much better what the fathers ought to do than the fathers did, he brings a certain dishonor on the fathers and so on. Remember that, what we saw. To repeat, what Socrates presents here is his pure virtue, which has nothing to do with virtue as an instrument. I repeat: How does he know that this pure selfless virtue is good, that it is not irrational? We get a kind of answer in the immediate sequel, and that is a passage of the utmost importance, in a way the center of the *Apology*. Yes? Read it.

**Reader:**

Perhaps it may seem odd that although I go about and give all this advice privately, quite a busybody—

**LS:** Ya, “busybody,” the same thing—that thing which is, you know, in the *Republic*: to mind one’s own business is the opposite of being a busybody. Yes?

**Reader:**

yet I dare not appear before your public assembly and advise the state. The reason for this is one which you have often heard me giving in many places, that something divine and spiritual comes to me—

**LS:** Ya, “divine and daemonic comes to me.” Ya?

**Reader:**

which Meletos puts into the indictment—

**LS:** No, no, they omit something even in the text here: Something divine and demonic comes to me, comma, *a voice*, comma. Yes?

**Reader:**

which Meletos put into the indictment in caricature. This has always been about me since my boyhood, a voice, which when it comes always turns me away from doing something I am intending to do, but never urges me on. That is what opposes my taking up public business. And quite right, too, I think; for you may be sure, gentlemen, that if I had meddled with public business in the past, I should have perished long ago and done no good either to you or to myself. Do not be annoyed at my telling the truth; the fact is that no man in the world will come off safe who honestly opposes either you or any other multitude, and tries to hinder the many unjust and illegal things done in a state. It is necessary that one who really and truly fights for the right, if he is to survive even for a short time, shall act as a private man, not as a public man. (31a-32a)

**LS:** Ya. That is very crucial, and because we find now a new reference, a wholly unexpected reference, to a superhuman source of knowledge different from the Delphic oracle. It is brought in rather accidentally. Socrates has explained why he was active by talking to individuals, to every Athenian individually. That was due to the Delphic oracle. But then the question arises here: But if you are such a busybody, Socrates, if you walk around the whole day in Athens, in the streets, the marketplace, the gymnasia, and buttonhole everyone and say, “Did you care for your virtue today?” [laughter]—honestly, that’s the way in which it’s presented—then why did he not go into politics, what was obviously the duty of an intelligent man? Why did he not *dare*—that’s the term used—to be politically active? Answer: Something divine and daemonic happens to him: a voice. A voice, that’s important, because it is only a voice; and therefore the question is: Can you draw any inference from the voice that there are daemons? You remember?<sup>79</sup> You know, the argument against Meletus: If<sup>80</sup> the daemonic voice doesn’t prove that there are daemons except in a purely verbal way, when you say a daemonic voice must be daemons. Then of course you cannot prove that Socrates believed in the gods in the way in which Socrates had proved it to Meletus.

A voice. That voice opposes to action; it never incites to action. The incitement to action came from the Delphic oracle, not from the daemonic voice, and it always opposes political action. It seems to be an irrational thing, but as Socrates makes clear in 31d6, it’s verdict is intelligible. “It seemed to me,” Socrates says, “to oppose political actions in a perfectly beautiful way”: *pangkalōs*, “a perfectly beautiful way,” that’s to say, a perfectly intelligible way. Now why is it so intelligible? Why is the verdict of that voice so intelligible? Why?

**Mr. Johnson:** Self-preservation.

**LS:** That’s it. Political activity would have led to Socrates’s death, for political activity is fatal to decent men. I disregard now this crucial implication, that political activity is fatal to decent men. I’m now concerned only with that point which Mr. Johnson has observed, that the *daimonion* as presented here in the *Apology*, whatever Plato may say in other dialogues, is concerned with self-preservation, with Socrates’s self-preservation. It is cautionary. The daemonic thing as presented here is *caution*. That is the simple meaning of that keeping back, for this reason: life is a condition of any other good. The daemonic thing leads to private life with a view to self-preservation, whereas the Delphic oracle leads to that quasi-public life—you know, buttonholing everyone. Complete disregard of self-preservation, completely selfless virtue, as we have seen before. The *daimonion* is directly concerned with Socrates’s self-preservation, and what does this mean in terms of the key question of the *Apology*? What is that key question, to make it quite clear? Why is Socrates so absolutely ignorant? I mean, what’s the concentrated form of this question?

**Student:** Virtue above self-preservation?

**LS:** Ya, more simply: Is death an evil or a good? The daemonic thing assures him that life is good because it points him towards self-preservation; and therefore also, although that is not made clear here at all, that to be awake is better than to be asleep, because sleep is akin to death. Ya? To be awake is better, and therefore to awaken others is better than to keep them asleep.

Very well. But what is that daemoniac thing? What is that daemoniac thing? Well, the daemoniac thing is mentioned in other Platonic dialogues, naturally, and the clearest presentation of the *daimonion* is given in a dialogue called [LS writes on the blackboard] *Theages*, which is almost universally considered spurious. I say “almost” because I believe I’m the only one, I think, [laughter] who is sure that it is genuine. And here we find one simple, very, very beautiful thing. It is a very crude presentation of the *daimonion*, for the reason that it’s the only dialogue of Socrates with a rustic, and people don’t consider the fact that when Socrates talks to someone from upstate—you know, this is really upstate Athens, as we can see—he cannot talk the same way as he would talk to a sophisticated downstater. That is the situation. By the way, this point was developed very nicely in a master’s thesis for the Committee on Social Thought by Seth Benardete, if you want to read that. It is a very enjoyable thesis, by the way. Now what he does in the *Theages* is this.<sup>81</sup> The fellow<sup>82</sup> from upstate said his son wants to study with Socrates because—he doesn’t know him quite well, but he wants to become famous; and Socrates finds out he also wants to become a tyrant, and he thinks the right thing is to go to school [LS chuckles] with Socrates. Socrates doesn’t want to help him. And then he says: You see, there is something strange with me. I have only one kind of knowledge, and that is eroticism. And that means, in other words—well, he didn’t put it so crudely, but he implies it: If I am attracted, I’ll take him on; if I am not attracted, I will not take him on. Ya? Good. But he doesn’t belabor that point, because that would be offensive, and so he immediately says: I have no knowledge except eroticism. And then they laugh as they . . . And then they say: All right, and then—I mean, that’s . . . And then he speaks of the daemoniac thing. You see: If he clicks, then I accept him; if he doesn’t click, I don’t. And then, in order to describe the daemoniac thing, he tells them absolutely awful horror stories [laughter], which is the . . . and that is the reason why the interpreters think it is not by Plato, you know, because of the crudeness. But it makes perfect sense in the context that because he can’t convince them by this elegant argument based on eroticism, then he uses fire and brimstone in the biblical sense.<sup>xix</sup>

Now the point is, Socrates substitutes here—he introduces *eros*, and uses *daimonion* as a substitute for *eros*. I suggest that *eros* and *daimonion* are the same thing. I mean, the notion of the voice of conscience, that is really no question. Now let me explain that *eros*; you must not think of Sigmund Freud. *Eros* has here a broad meaning. It means all natural inclinations, but particularly those which are indicated by the virtues. But if it means all natural inclinations, it means of course also the basic ones, and all the—

**Student:** Some . . .

**LS:** There is perfect agreement. Yes, I mean perfect consistency. Socrates has a *daimonion*; that means that the natural inclinations are unusually powerful, so that they are more powerful than a mere opinion, and that shows on all levels. It must also show on the level—therefore, that Socrates was a man of common sense, in the crude sense of the word. You know, he had a certain sense of self-preservation . . . is implied in that. Socrates is sobriety itself. Yes?

**Student:** Doesn’t Socrates say he knows that he’s right to go to death because the voice doesn’t interfere, and this would indicate that self-preservation isn’t the—

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<sup>xix</sup> Plato, *Theages* 128b-130e.

**LS:** It's not the highest consideration. But it is of course also something in him. But the answer to the question which you very legitimately raise, is this: You have to consider circumstance. What is the most massive circumstance of this affair, this condemnation—I mean, external circumstance? I mean, after all, you know what circumstances mean.<sup>83</sup> For example, at what time<sup>84</sup> did this take place?

**Same Student:** When he's seventy.

**LS:** Ya. So in other words, a sensible man of seventy will have a different position to the value of his life for him than a young man of thirty. We come to that when we read the *Crito*. You see, in the *Crito* that is discussed at some length.<sup>85</sup> Should Socrates escape or not? There is on the one<sup>86</sup> [hand] a simple answer: Obey the laws. But that is not so simple, as we shall see. And therefore a prudential consideration enters, and there, in a prudential consideration, the simple verdict of the law is not sufficient. You consider the circumstance, and one important circumstance surely is Socrates's age.

**Student:** You mean if he were a young man, he might have made a different—

**LS:** Ya, we don't know. It might have been that. If old age was a relevant consideration, it is a fair question, at any rate, which course he would have taken when he was forty. That is the point. But that we can only decide when we come to the *Crito*. Good.

Now let me first finish this point, if you don't mind. Now the natural revulsion against death and against stupor and torpor: look back now to the Delphic oracle. The Delphic oracle, by inducing Socrates to expose himself to hatred, unpopularity, death, says just the opposite. And here I can only remind you, because that would lead us too far, of the *Wasps*. You remember the action of the *Wasps*, of the hero of the *Wasps*, was also based on the Delphic oracle. This action also was misanthropic, not guided by love of man. The *daimonion* is guided by, personified by love of human beings, philanthropy. Eros is the philanthropic god, as you may remember from the *Banquet*. Now Mr. Gildin?

**Mr. Gildin:** There seems to be a parallel between the *daimonion* and the kind of action which he decides not to take politically, because the *daimonion* tells him what not to do, and the kind of action he speaks of consists in hindering unjust and illegal acts. In other words, it would seem to be—<sup>87</sup>

**LS:** That's very good.

**Mr. Gildin:** It would seem to be impossible for him to be the *daimonion* of Athens.<sup>88</sup> There's a place for such a voice in an individual, but not in a political community. Or have I ruined it?

**LS:** No, no, but I will come to that. Keep it in mind. I didn't think of it, but it links up very well with the point which comes up. Only a word about the implication: the just political life, which Socrates would have regarded as the only one feasible for him, is essentially, he makes clear, a life in opposition to the multitude because of the essential injustice of the multitude. That he states very strongly. A just man<sup>89</sup> cannot remain just by going into politics. Clearly that implies

that Socrates knows what justice is, and we do not know yet whether in all respects. In the sequel he gives proofs of his justice and the injustice of the multitude under the democracy. But in what did this justice consist, in this case? I do not mean now the somewhat more subtle point raised by Mr. Gildin.<sup>90</sup> What is his justice, very simply?

**Student:** Following the law.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Following the law.

**LS:** Legality. Socrates insists on legality. Ya. Namely, they wanted to condemn the generals all<sup>91</sup> by one verdict, whereas according to the law everyone had to be adjudged by himself. Socrates obeyed the law. And that is of course clear. One meaning, the primary meaning of legality or of justice is to obey the law and not follow your passions, naturally. That's the reason why people establish laws: to have a protection against irrational judgments. But in this particular case, and I think that is very important, that I think we should read—no, no, that comes later. I'm sorry. This particular law that appears<sup>92</sup> [in] the context is obviously also a wise law, ya? It does not merely happen to be the Athenian law; it's a sensible law. And this tells us one little thing, although it is not developed here in any way: that justice, while being primarily legality, is not identical with legality, because otherwise we would not speak of unjust laws, and to speak of unjust laws is obviously necessary. That is only indicated here.

As for this question of Socrates's knowledge of justice, I would like to say only one word, because we can't develop this now: that, I believe, is identical here [in] this context with his admission that there is a political art, although he's not competent in it. And I will speak of that problem next time.

In the sequel he speaks also<sup>93</sup> of how he behaved legally under an oligarchy. In both cases, as Mr. Gildin said, Socrates's injustice really consists, strictly speaking,<sup>94</sup> in preventing injustices, in not doing anything unjust. But was he positively just? That is the question which you meant. Ya? For example, that is a question which we also will take up next time. And then we have to take up this whole question, the whole description—I can only state the problem—the whole description of Socrates's life as given in the *Apology*. The *Apology*, as I said on a former occasion, is a kind of entrance gate to that cosmos of the Platonic dialogues. Here Socrates is presented as presenting himself to the Athenian people, the Athenian *dēmos*. Well, we should expect that this will be confirmed, this buttonholing business, you know, by the many dialogues which Plato wrote. According to the *Apology*, Socrates is a man who gets up at four in the morning, goes out and begins approaching Mr. So-and-so: What is virtue? Or: Did you care for your soul? What is . . . ? Socrates has always initiated this. In a different expression, that all dialogues are voluntary, in the sense that Socrates seeks something. Ya? But if we look at the dialogues, we see that only part of them are voluntary. Another part is imposed on Socrates: they approach him. If any buttonholing is done, it is done by others.<sup>95</sup> And furthermore, we see that the dialogues show us Socrates engaged not in conversation with a chance fellow citizen. There are only two exceptions to that rule, and the exceptions prove the rule.<sup>96</sup> When he comes home from a campaign exhausted, and it was a tough time, what does he do? Where does he go the



next morning? To the gymnasium, where there are *young* men, youths. Charmides talks to him. That he likes. Or then he goes also perhaps to places where Gorgias [is], you know, to talk to Gorgias. This . . . And<sup>97</sup> I mean, there is no question that he did this kind of thing.

So there are no dialogues as—there isn't a single Platonic dialogue which complies with that description of Socratic life. Plato refutes this description of Socrates by his own popular dialogue. There are two dialogues in which Socrates really has put his initiative and approaches a nameless fellow, a chance acquaintance . . . These dialogues are the *Minos* and the *Hipparchus*, two small dialogues which are, again, almost universally regarded as spurious. And they are [laughter] . . . the *Minos* begins: What is law? And the result of the dialogue is really rather subversive; I mean, he puts a big question mark behind the sacredness of the Athenian law. The *Hipparchus* begins also: What is love of gain? And it leads up to a certain justification or vindication of the Athenian tyrant Hipparchus. Which is also not what he claims . . . You see, they are strange; as I say, the exception, when he takes the initiative addressing a chance fellow human being, proves the rule. He didn't do it. He didn't do that.

And that of course is the most interesting question regarding the *Apology*: What does this presentation of Socrates, this wholly unrealistic presentation mean? After all, this was not the defense speech actually delivered by Socrates in the year 399. That was written years—perhaps ten years later, twenty years, no one knows—after the death of Socrates, and in a way<sup>98</sup> which had of course a relation to the accusation, naturally, but which had also the function, as I say, to give the only popular speech which Socrates ever made. You see? You remember, there was a sketch of a popular speech given here in 29, ya?, where<sup>99</sup> “You best of men, being Athenian,” and so on and so on, in 29d following.

There are such speeches. Xenophon, whose deliberate principle is to leave everything at the most pedestrian level—the low ceiling, as I call it—gives at least one such speech in the third<sup>xx</sup> chapter of the *Memorabilia*, in which Socrates is presented as a kind of stump-orator. Ya? He goes on the stump and makes a speech in favor of continence, which is very . . . but also someone less gifted than Socrates could have made it. [LS chuckles] You know, it contains this very charming passage, when he says: To whom would you entrust, if you died early, your son<sup>100</sup> for education and your daughters for watching—which includes the idea that girls don't need education and shows some light on the manners of olden times.<sup>xxi</sup> And<sup>101</sup> that is a kind of caricature, a benevolent caricature of Socrates. But the serious idea behind it is this: it is impossible for a philosopher to present what he is doing in a popular speech, in a speech addressed to the *dēmos* of Athens. Impossible. They wouldn't understand. And<sup>102</sup> what is immediately audible is of course something which is, in a way, comic, ya? I mean, it has a great elevation and so on, and<sup>103</sup> this elevation however is, when you understand it more deeply, a mere reflection of the true elevation of Socrates. That is the elevation as it can be understood by the ordinary man, and<sup>104</sup> then you understand the true elevation only in caricature. And there is a deep element of the comical in this presentation as I think we will see next time.

Now next time we will have to discuss the end of the *Apology*, and Monday we will have the paper on the *Crito*.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>xx</sup> The speech occurs in the fifth chapter of the first book.

<sup>xxi</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1. 5.2.

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- <sup>1</sup> Deleted "In other words, there is no—."
  - <sup>2</sup> Deleted "that is—."
  - <sup>3</sup> Deleted "You also—."
  - <sup>4</sup> Deleted "—as."
  - <sup>5</sup> Deleted "you know"
  - <sup>6</sup> Deleted "But how would you—."
  - <sup>7</sup> Deleted "in terms—."
  - <sup>8</sup> Deleted "I don't think that's—."
  - <sup>9</sup> Deleted "I have nothing—."
  - <sup>10</sup> Deleted ", all right. What—."
  - <sup>11</sup> Deleted "Why—."
  - <sup>12</sup> Deleted "that—."
  - <sup>13</sup> Deleted "Does anyone—."
  - <sup>14</sup> Deleted "what—why—I mean,."
  - <sup>15</sup> Deleted "that—."
  - <sup>16</sup> Deleted "you're the same—."
  - <sup>17</sup> Deleted "on—."
  - <sup>18</sup> Deleted "not."
  - <sup>19</sup> Deleted "the."
  - <sup>20</sup> Deleted "what do—."
  - <sup>21</sup> Deleted "I mean"
  - <sup>22</sup> Deleted "but—."
  - <sup>23</sup> Deleted "the."
  - <sup>24</sup> Deleted "and."
  - <sup>25</sup> Deleted "What—but what—."
  - <sup>26</sup> Deleted "claims—."
  - <sup>27</sup> Deleted "means self—."
  - <sup>28</sup> Deleted "There is something—."
  - <sup>29</sup> Deleted "ya?"
  - <sup>30</sup> Deleted "to."
  - <sup>31</sup> Deleted "the Delphic oracle—."
  - <sup>32</sup> Deleted "now."
  - <sup>33</sup> Deleted "they will no longer—."
  - <sup>34</sup> Deleted "is,."
  - <sup>35</sup> Deleted "Socrates—."
  - <sup>36</sup> Deleted "it is not—."
  - <sup>37</sup> Deleted "He knows only—."
  - <sup>38</sup> Deleted "Socrates is in—now, we come now to—."
  - <sup>39</sup> Deleted "is this—."
  - <sup>40</sup> Deleted "be a slave on the—I'd rather."
  - <sup>41</sup> Deleted "Achilles after his death—."
  - <sup>42</sup> Deleted "is—."
  - <sup>43</sup> Deleted "That's the most—."
  - <sup>44</sup> Deleted "take it—."
  - <sup>45</sup> Deleted "Anything you—."
  - <sup>46</sup> Deleted "cannot—."
  - <sup>47</sup> Deleted "he did it—."
  - <sup>48</sup> Deleted "the human—."
  - <sup>49</sup> Deleted "But let us, since we—."
  - <sup>50</sup> Deleted "why is this."
  - <sup>51</sup> Deleted "for—."
  - <sup>52</sup> Deleted "the mere—."
  - <sup>53</sup> Deleted "3)."

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- 54 Deleted "He does not fear—."
- 55 Deleted "this central—."
- 56 Deleted "He has no—."
- 57 Deleted "that is—."
- 58 Deleted "That's not—."
- 59 Deleted "He will not obey it.."
- 60 Deleted "trying to by leading—."
- 61 Deleted "anyone—."
- 62 Deleted "what is—."
- 63 Deleted "but Socrates' conviction—."
- 64 Deleted "to take more—."
- 65 Deleted "Yes, that is this crucial—."
- 66 Deleted "remain—."
- 67 Deleted "it has—."
- 68 Deleted "We have—the whole—."
- 69 Deleted "as a god—."
- 70 Deleted "therefore—."
- 71 Deleted "that was—."
- 72 Deleted "is also—."
- 73 Deleted "Now—and—he also is sent—."
- 74 Deleted "strike—."
- 75 Deleted "by doing—."
- 76 Deleted "doing—."
- 77 Deleted "been—."
- 78 Deleted "you become—."
- 79 Deleted "And if there—."
- 80 Deleted "the voice doesn't—."
- 81 Deleted "a fellow—."
- 82 Deleted "from downstate—."
- 83 Deleted "I mean,."
- 84 Deleted "was it—."
- 85 Deleted "Why should—."
- 86 Deleted "place."
- 87 Deleted "it would be—."
- 88 Deleted "There is no place—."
- 89 Deleted "—he."
- 90 Deleted "How did he show—how did—."
- 91 Deleted "at one—."
- 92 Deleted "on."
- 93 Deleted "of Socrates—."
- 94 Deleted "in doing—."
- 95 Deleted "So—."
- 96 Deleted "Even, he talks, when he goes."
- 97 Deleted "he didn't—."
- 98 Deleted "in which there was a kind of—."
- 99 Deleted "he—"I"—no,."
- 100 Changed from "'Whom—to whom would you entrust your—if you died early, your sons."
- 101 Deleted "it—and that—I mean,."
- 102 Deleted "from—."
- 103 Deleted "which—."
- 104 Deleted "that is—."
- 105 Deleted "Mr. Bergman, are you? Oh, you gave it to me. Then, do you want to read it, or, in class?" "It is rather long. It's long" "I see. Well then, I will ask Rabbi Weiss, who is second, to read it in class. Are you ready for next Monday? And Mr. White, you know that it is ready, but you did not tell me..."

## Session 12: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —The Delphic oracle leads him to realize the knowledge of ignorance, the depreciation of human wisdom—it's of no worth—and implies we don't know whether death is not a great good after all. The daemonic thing on the other hand pushes him to concern with self-preservation, and therefore conveys the message that life is good. Now I interpreted that the *daimonion* in Socrates stands for the natural inclinations, and that implies the natural inclinations are as such *good*. This problem we have to discuss, because it is absolutely crucial for the whole later history of social thought and social science up to the present day. The notion that the natural inclinations are good is underlying the concepts of natural right and natural law. Natural right means, in the original meaning of the term, that which is intrinsically right as distinguished from everything which is right only by human arrangements. But the intrinsically right is that<sup>1</sup> [which] is by *nature* right. Nature is the standard. The same applies also to the concept of natural law. Now you all know that this view, that nature supplies us with a standard, is today rejected. But this rejection of nature as a standard is not a recent thing but is implied in modern political thought from the very beginning. One can state that the position of modern philosophy from the very beginning was this: the ancient philosophers made the dogmatic premise that nature is good. Why should it be good? In other words, they, the modern thinkers—I will give you some names later<sup>2</sup>—had discovered a problem in which the ancient thinkers had not seen a problem at all.

To indicate the present-day view, the most beautiful statement of that which I have read or heard occurs somewhere in Melville. I have quoted that frequently. In one of his stories—I think it's on the Mississippi, *The Confidence Man*, you will know which story it is I'm quoting, because I have read it only in a book on Melville—someone, this confidence man, this trickster, says something about the goodness of nature,<sup>3</sup> to which he owes everything; and the fellow to whom he addresses that remark says: My eyes, for example, that they work, I owe not to nature, but to an oculist in Philadelphia [laughter] because he had to improve nature so that he could see at all.<sup>i</sup> So nature, in other words, is nothing.<sup>4</sup> Nature is in constant need of improvement and change, of human art, of technology, of the conquest of nature. Conquest of nature, never forget, means that nature is an enemy. You don't conquer your friends.

In the recent book by Arnold Brecht, *Political Theory*,<sup>ii</sup> this is the guiding theme, you can say. The usual distinction between facts and values is there presented as follows: the complete, the radical distinction between facts and values is indispensable, because there is no possibility of making an inference, a legitimate inference, from the is to the ought. You might have heard this *n* times; that, you know, that this *is* so doesn't prove that it is *good* that it is so. And Brecht—who is an oldish man, belongs to an older stratum of this kind of theory,<sup>5</sup> a stratum which was more solid, I must say, than what we have now—says the conclusion of the is to the ought would be legitimate only if the is were knowable as the work of the good God; then the is would be

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<sup>i</sup> Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (New York: Hendricks House, 1954), 123. The edition cited is the one most readily available to Strauss at the time. The first edition is 1857. The chapter in which this story is told is chapter 21, "A Hard Case."

<sup>ii</sup> Arnold Brecht, *Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959).

intrinsically good. But this,<sup>6</sup> namely, that reality is the work of the good God, is not knowable, and therefore the inference is not legitimate. Yes?

**Student:** May I ask you what was this book again?

**LS:** Arnold Brecht, B-r-e-c-h-t. *Political Theory*, Princeton, 1958 or '59. First . . . I mean, it is not an original book in any way, but it is a respectable book because it gives you a coherent history of this fact-value distinction and presents in a sober way—sober, I think one can say—the accepted opinion, ya?<sup>7</sup> How does he call it, Mr. Schrock? Social science relativism?

**Mr. Schrock:** Yes, that's it.

**LS:** Or scientific relativism?

**Mr. Schrock:** Scientific relativism.<sup>iii</sup>

**LS:** <sup>8</sup>May I take the liberty of telling you that he criticizes my criticism of this view and says I haven't understand the whole problem.<sup>iv</sup> But I don't regard this<sup>9</sup> in any way as detracting from the book, because the value of the book consists in being a presentation, a sober presentation, of the accepted opinion, and that was lacking. Most people who presented it were real savages, I'm sorry to say, who without any inkling of the deeper issue simply said that values are just preferences. You know? Someone likes steaks, another likes pineapples, and that's all there is to it. Brecht is much better than that.

But<sup>10</sup> I mean, to trace it to the origin: Hobbes, his doctrine of the state of nature, a term which didn't play any role in political theory before. Hobbes really made it the key term. The state of nature is bad. The real thing is to get out of the state of nature. If one would apply the term "state of nature" to earlier thought, it would mean the state of nature is a good state, the state of perfection. That was the ordinary meaning. The term doesn't occur in political theory before. It stems from theology, from Christian theology, and is not at home in political thought. Only in Hobbes.

So the state of nature is bad, that means of course also, nature provides a standard. But only a negative standard. Nature tells us from what we should get away, and therewith it gives us direction, but it is not itself the standard. But the profoundest presentation of this basic premise<sup>11</sup> occurs in Descartes's *Meditations*, where Descartes speaks of a bad genius—you can say a bad god—as *the* ground for doubt. We do not know whether we are not the work of an evil genius and all our natural faculties are not his work. This may all be delusions, you know, that we see things, and various kinds of things. They may all be delusions. We may be exposed<sup>12</sup> to the artifices of a clever deceiver who has no other intention, so to speak, than to deceive us. And Descartes then tries to show that even if it were as bad, we still could protect ourselves against

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<sup>iii</sup> See pages 117 and following for the beginning of Brecht's discussion of this term, which is "Scientific Value Relativism."

<sup>iv</sup> See especially 263 ff., 549-51.

him, because if he wants to deceive us he must give us some intelligence.<sup>v</sup> Ya? You can't deceive a stone. And this intelligence which he had to give us in order to deceive us is our protection. But it is only this intelligence or this reason, not nature, on which we can rely. And so not nature but reason gives us guidance: nature and reason here used as *opposites*. And this culminates in Kant's doctrine, according to which the moral law is the law of freedom in contradistinction to the law of nature. The traditional view was that the moral law is the law of nature. For Kant that is incompatible. So this problem, which is so crucial for modern thought, occurs to us in the *Apology*, among other writings. The *Apology* shows that Socrates, or Plato, was aware of this problem, that he faced it. And the expression of that is: death may be better than life. How Socrates thought that, we must try to understand.

Now to return to the immediately visible part of the argument: Socrates says that he is ignorant of the greatest things, but also he *knows* that it is evil and disgraceful to act unjustly and to disobey one's betters. Now I interpreted this to mean: it is evil and disgraceful to transgress the law and to transgress the intrinsically right. Wrongdoing, [to transgress the] law; disobeying one's betters, to transgress the intrinsically right. Now this intrinsically right proves to be superior to the law, at least in the case of Socrates. Socrates, as we have seen, refuses to obey a possible law which would forbid him to philosophize. We have discussed that. Therefore all right, Socrates—the crucial point is that Socrates knows the intrinsically right. How does he know it? He gives the example of his conduct at the trial of the generals, ten generals, after the battle of Arginusae. Socrates acted justly at that trial. In what did his just action consist? He obeyed the law. The multitude wanted to condemn them all together, whereas the law provided that each one should be judged by himself. Ya, but there is more to that. That law was not merely the actual law of Athens. A moment's reflection tells everyone that it was a wise law; I mean, that it is an impossible procedure to condemn people *en bloc* and not to look in each case at the guilt or the degree of guilt. So Socrates has another criterion, that is clear, for justice than the mere law. Now let us turn to 37a to b, that is<sup>13</sup> in the translation on page 442, beginning of the second paragraph.

**Reader:** Let's see. "Perhaps you think that in saying this"?

**LS:** Yes.

**Reader:**

Perhaps you think that in saying this, very much as I spoke of appeals for pity, I am just showing off; no such thing, gentlemen; I will tell you what I mean. I am convinced that I never willingly wronged anyone, but I cannot convince you, for we have conversed together only a short time. If we had a law, as other people have, that a trial for life or death is to be spread over many days and not confined to one, I think you would have been convinced; but as it is I cannot disperse great prejudices in a moment. (37a-b)

**LS:** Now let us stop here. You see,<sup>14</sup> what does Socrates do here in this passage?

**Student:** He criticizes the law.

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<sup>v</sup> See especially *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 1 (for the doubt), 2 (for the "intelligence"), and 3 (for Descartes's first proof of God's existence).

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** He criticizes the Athenian law.

**LS:** He criticizes the law, ya, on such an occasion. That's quite extraordinary. And on what ground?

**Student:** That it is unjust.

**LS:** Ya.

**Same Student:** Yes, but it has to say more than that.

**LS:** Ya, namely?

**Same Student:** That it doesn't give him enough time to defend himself.

**Different Student:** Makes a poor judgment.

**LS:** Yes. It's a bad law. So<sup>15</sup> Socrates has then a criterion for distinguishing between bad and good laws. And that means the identification of justice with obedience to the law, with legality, is untenable, manifestly untenable. And I don't know what an addict of the value-fact distinction would say, but I must confess it's an excellent argument, a rational argument that such a law is a better law,<sup>16</sup> as proposed by Socrates, than the existing law, because the law wants to punish the guilty<sup>17</sup> and not the innocent. Any penal law, whatever<sup>18</sup> the legislator might understand by it—you know, there can be all kinds of funny notions as to what constitutes innocent or guilty<sup>19</sup>—tries to find out who is guilty and to discriminate between the guilty and innocent, and then it must take the necessary precautions in order not to punish the innocent. Take even the Nazi system: they didn't want to destroy good Nazis. Ya? Obviously not. And therefore the legal procedure<sup>20</sup> would have to be, if they had had any sense, at least to discriminate clearly between good Nazis, who might have looked<sup>21</sup> [like] bad Nazis for one moment, and other people.<sup>22</sup> So that's really intrinsically sound, although very insufficient, as my specimen, my example, showed.

Socrates claims then to possess knowledge of justice. But he denies that he possesses knowledge of the greatest things. How can this seeming contradiction be resolved?

**Student:** Justice is not among the greatest things.

**LS:** Knowledge of justice does not belong to knowledge of the greatest things. Ya. It is, stated differently: knowledge of justice is part of knowledge of the *human* things, and the human things are by definition distinguished from the divine things. And the divine things are the greatest things. Sure, but<sup>23</sup> to come back to the point, Socrates claims to possess knowledge of justice, and we have to understand that. On an earlier occasion we have seen that Socrates admitted that there is a political art, which he denied, however, to possess. And [he] says of that political art—

of the political men, rather—that they know nothing noble and good, i.e., nothing of the greatest things. But the political art is an art, for example, like the art of shoemakers.<sup>24</sup> Whatever you may say, it is possible for you to distinguish between a good and bad shoemaker. I mean, just put on the shoe made by a good and by a bad shoemaker, and then you will see the difference. And<sup>25</sup> a little bit more complicated, but in the long run also it is easy to distinguish between a good and bad statesman. Ya?<sup>26</sup> I mean, the consumption takes such a longer time to test, yes? You know? For example, Chamberlain might have appeared in a different light in 1937—Neville Chamberlain, I mean<sup>vi</sup>—than in 1939. Ya? It needed these two years to bring out certain things which showed his lack of judgment in certain important matters. But in principle it is the same thing.

What is that political art, then? And that we must clarify, because our subject is the origins of political science. Now what is that art? Comparable to the art of the shoemaker, although more ambitious in every sense: the art of managing the affairs of the city by deed and by speech. This art is a prephilosophic art, as the art of the shoemaker, that exists or can exist among savages as well as among the most civilized people. Still, the awareness that it is an art is somehow connected with philosophy. It is, as it were, unconsciously used as an art everywhere where men live in societies, but that men are aware it is an art is connected with philosophy. External sign of that—I mean, that King David in the Bible possessed the political art can hardly be doubted, but there is no Hebrew word for the political art, no biblical word. The Greeks had that word,<sup>27</sup> acquiring it indeed in the period when their way of speaking had already become influenced by philosophy.

Now let us look into that political art, keeping in mind its relation to the question, the knowledge of justice, and let us first understand the term. This political art in Greek—the<sup>28</sup> Greeks had two different words [LS writes on the blackboard]: one is *technē*, and the other is *epistēmē*. Now the traditional translation is for that, “art”; and for that “science,” but in the classical period they are used rather indiscriminately. You know? I mean, the strict formal distinction occurs in Aristotle, but even Aristotle does not always use them in the strict terminological—so we can also say the political science; it doesn’t make any difference, political science or political art. Now what is<sup>29</sup> this political science in the primary sense, the art or the science possessed by the good politician or statesman?<sup>30</sup> Does anyone of you know where we find the first presentation<sup>31</sup> of that science in its pre-philosophic meaning? It’s a very important question. I believe I haven’t discussed that subject for some years in my classes, otherwise you would know, some of you would know. Well, *the* statement occurs in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, book 1, chapter 4. I will read it to you. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is about the art of speech, naturally. One kind of speech is deliberative speech, the speech in political assemblies concerned with what is expedient or inexpedient for the *polis*:

We must first ascertain about what kind of good or bad things the deliberative orator advises, since he cannot do so about everything, but only about things which may possibly happen or not. Everything which of necessity either is or will

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<sup>vi</sup> Neville Chamberlain was Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1937 to 1940. His policy of appeasement toward Hitler in the Munich Agreement of 1938, to which Britain was a party, allowed Nazi Germany to annex the Czech Sudetenland. In 1939, however, Hitler annexed additional Czech territory and invaded Poland.



be, or which cannot possibly be or come to pass, is outside the scope of deliberation. Indeed, even in the case of things that are possible advice is not universally appropriate; for they include certain advantages, natural and accidental, about which it is not worthwhile to offer advice. But it is clear that advice is limited to those subjects about which we take counsel; and such are all those which can naturally be referred to ourselves and the first cause of whose origination is in our own power; for our examination is limited to finding out whether such things are possible or impossible for us to perform. [Not whether they are possible for angels or, for that matter, for foreigners. We are discussing what we in this community can do.—LS] However, there is no need at present to endeavour to enumerate with scrupulous exactness or to classify those subjects which men are wont to discuss, or to define them as far as possible with strict accuracy, since this is not the function of the rhetorical art but of one that is more intelligent and exact, and further, more than its legitimate subjects of inquiry have already been assigned to it. For what we have said before is true: that Rhetoric is composed of logic<sup>vii</sup> [let me say—LS] and of that political science<sup>viii</sup> which is concerned with characters.<sup>ix</sup>

Aristotle doesn't mean by that that there is political science which is not concerned with characters, but he only wants to exclude any notion that there could be a political science which does not deal ultimately with characters, with good and bad men. So in other words, a strict discussion would belong rather to political science, but here he has to give at least a sketch, because of the overlapping of rhetoric and the political art.

Now, we must<sup>x</sup> say that the most important subjects about which all men deliberate and deliberative orators harangue, are five in number, to wit: ways and means, war and peace, the defense of the country, imports and exports, legislation.<sup>xi</sup>

These are the five things.<sup>32</sup> You see, he makes a distinction between the defense of the country, which means the ordinary guarding, fortresses for the frontiers, and the question, "Should we now make war or keep peace?"—which is a different question, surely. Yes? And then he develops these themes. Let me only read what he says about legislation:

With a view to the safety of the city,<sup>xii</sup> it is necessary that the orator should be able to judge of all these question [namely, food, imports and exports, ways and means, war and peace, and the guarding of the country—LS] but an understanding of legislation is of special importance, for it is on the law that the safety of the city

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<sup>vii</sup> Freese has "analytical science."

<sup>viii</sup> Freese has "that branch of political science"

<sup>ix</sup> Freese has "Ethics." It is likely that Strauss uses the Loeb edition of the Freese translation. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 39-41 (1.4.1-5; 1359a-b).

<sup>x</sup> Freese has "may"

<sup>xi</sup> Op. cit., 41 (1.4.7; 1359b).

<sup>xii</sup> Freese has "State."

is based.<sup>xiii</sup> Wherefore he must know how many regimes<sup>xiv</sup> there are; what is expedient for each; and the natural causes of its downfall, whether they are peculiar to the particular form of government or opposed to it. By being ruined by causes particular to itself, I mean that, with the exception of the best regime,<sup>xv</sup> all the rest are ruined by being relaxed or strained to excess. Thus democracy, not only when relaxed, but also when strained to excess, becomes weaker and will end in an oligarchy; similarly, not only does an aquiline or snub nose reach the mean, when one of these defects is relaxed [yes, you know,<sup>33</sup> the opposites—LS] but when it becomes aquiline or snubbed to excess, it is altered to such an extent that even the likeness of a nose is lost.

Yes, but again,<sup>34</sup> if they would come to the middle, they would<sup>35</sup> give you a normal nose; that is the perfect regime. You know? The perfect regime. That's all right.<sup>36</sup> Good.

Moreover, with reference to acts of legislation, it is useful not only to understand what regime is expedient by judging in the light of the past [I mean, reading histories—LS] but also to become acquainted with those in existence in other nations [comparative government—LS] to learn what regimes<sup>xvi</sup> are suitable to what kinds of people.

For example, for the Persians, their kind of kingship may be much better, and they would be lost in a republic.

It is clear, therefore, that for legislation books of travel are useful [Ya, you see, he doesn't say, "scientific books on South America"; he says, "books of travel" because he thinks intelligent travelers are perfectly good guides for ruling.—LS] since they have to understand the laws of other nations, and for political debates<sup>xvii</sup> historical works. [There you find models for political speeches.—LS] All these things, however, belong to Politics and not to Rhetoric.<sup>xviii</sup>

So you have here the framework, really, of what political science even today fundamentally means: the kind of knowledge which man needs for acting wisely in political matters. There is no reflection on methodology, because methodology is implied: you know how to go about it. If you want to find about Nehru's India, you surely may also need some statistics, because you can't count the heads and you can't count the amount of food the Indian needs, uses. Sure, that's easy. It may be technically difficult, but it's not a serious problem, an intellectual problem. And so that's it.

Now that is then really a classic statement which,<sup>37</sup> if there were a good reader introduction to political science, that would be in it. But what has this to do with our present problem, Socrates?

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<sup>xiii</sup> Freese has "laws," "State."

<sup>xiv</sup> Freese has "forms of government."

<sup>xv</sup> Freese has "perfect form of government."

<sup>xvi</sup> Freese has "and to learn what kinds of government."

<sup>xvii</sup> Freese has "speeches."

<sup>xviii</sup> Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1.4.12-13; 1360a.

Now the answer is simple. What Aristotle does here is based on a Socratic statement. Mr. Kendrick? Do you recognize it?

**Mr. Kendrick:** No, I missed it.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Kendrick:** I missed it.

**LS:** I said Aristotle's statement, which I read in parts, is based on a Socratic statement.

**Mr. Kendrick:** First book in the *Memorabilia*?

**LS:** No, no. No, in the *Memorabilia*, book 3, chapter 6, the conversation of Socrates with Glaucon, the fellow whom you know from Plato's *Republic*:

"The son of Ariston,<sup>xix</sup> Glaucon, was attempting to become an orator and striving for headship in the *polis*,<sup>xx</sup> though he was less than twenty years old; and none of his friends or relations could check him, though he would get himself dragged from the platform and make himself a laughing-stock. Only Socrates, who was benevolent to him<sup>xxi</sup> for the sake of Plato and for the sake of Charmides, the son of Glaucon,<sup>xxii</sup> alone<sup>xxiii</sup> managed to check him.

For once on meeting him, he stopped him and contrived to engage his attention by saying: 'Glaucon, have you made up your mind to be our chief man in the *polis*?'<sup>xxiv</sup>  
'I have, Socrates.'

'Well, by Zeus,<sup>xxv</sup> there is no more honourable ambition in the world; for obviously, if you gain your object, you will be able to get whatever you want, and you will have the means of helping your friends: you will lift up your father's house and exalt your fatherland; and you will make a name for yourself first at home, later on in Greece, and possibly, like Themistocles, in foreign lands as well; wherever you go, you will be a man of mark.'

When Glaucon heard this, he felt proud and gladly stayed on.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Next Socrates asked, 'Well, Glaucon, as you want to win honour, is it not obvious that you must benefit your city?'

'Most certainly.'

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<sup>xix</sup> Marchant has "Ariston's son."

<sup>xx</sup> Marchant has "state."

<sup>xxi</sup> Marchant has "who took an interest in him."

<sup>xxii</sup> Marchant has "for the sake of Plato and Glaucon's son Charmides."

<sup>xxiii</sup> Marchant omits "alone."

<sup>xxiv</sup> Marchant has "state."

<sup>xxv</sup> Marchant has "upon my word."

<sup>xxvi</sup> Marchant has "lingered."

‘By the gods,<sup>xxvii</sup> don’t be reticent, then; but tell us how you propose to begin your services to the *polis*.’<sup>xxviii</sup>

As Glaucon remained silent,<sup>xxix</sup> apparently considering for the first time how to begin, Socrates said: ‘If you wanted to add to a friend’s fortune, you would set about making him richer. Will you try, then, to make our city richer?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Would she not be richer if she had a larger revenue?’

‘Oh yes, obviously.’<sup>xxx</sup>

‘Now tell me, from what sources are the city’s revenues at present derived and what is their total? No doubt you have gone into this matter, in order to raise the amount of any that are deficient and supply any that are lacking?’

‘Certainly not,’ exclaimed Glaucon, ‘I haven’t gone into that.’

‘Well, if you have left that out, tell us the expenditure of the city. No doubt you intend to cut down any items that are excessive.’

‘The fact is that I<sup>xxxi</sup> haven’t time yet for that either.’

‘Oh, then we will postpone the business of making the city richer; for how is it possible to look after income and expenditure without knowing what they are?’

‘Well, Socrates, one can make our enemies contribute to the revenue of the city.’<sup>xxxii</sup>

[Laughter]

‘Yes, by Zeus,<sup>xxxiii</sup> provided he is stronger than they; but if he be weaker, he may lose what he has got instead.’

‘True.’

‘Therefore, in order to advise her whom to fight, it is necessary to know the strength of the city and of the enemy, so that, if the city be stronger, one may recommend her to go to war, but if weaker than the enemy, may persuade her to beware.’

‘You are right.’

‘First, then, tell us the naval and military strength of our city, and that<sup>xxxiv</sup> of her enemies.’

‘By Zeus,<sup>xxxv</sup> I can’t tell you that out of my head.’

‘Well, if you have made notes, fetch them, for I should greatly like to hear this.’

‘But, by Zeus,<sup>xxxvi</sup> I haven’t yet made any notes either.’

‘Then we will postpone offering advice about war too for the present. You are new to power, and perhaps have not yet<sup>xxxvii</sup> had time to investigate such big things.<sup>xxxviii</sup> But the defence of the country, now [you see, the defense of the country is a different question

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Marchant has “pray.”

<sup>xxviii</sup> Marchant has “state.”

<sup>xxix</sup> Marchant has “dumb.”

<sup>xxx</sup> Marchant has “presumably.”

<sup>xxxi</sup> Marchant has “the fact is, I.”

<sup>xxxii</sup> Marchant has “to the city’s wealth.”

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Marchant has “of course.”

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Marchant has “and then that.”

<sup>xxxv</sup> Marchant has “No, of course.”

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Marchant has “I tell you.”

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Marchant omits “yet.”

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Marchant has “problems.”

from war and peace—LS] I feel sure that<sup>xxxix</sup> you have thought about that, and know how many of the garrisons are well placed and how many are not, and how many of the guards are efficient and how many are not; and you will propose to strengthen the well-placed garrisons and to do away with those that are superfluous.’

‘By Zeus,<sup>xl</sup> I shall propose to do away with them all, for the only effect of maintaining them is that our crops are stolen. [Apparently here he knows something.—LS] But if you do away with the garrisons, don’t you think that anyone will be at liberty to rob us openly? However, have you been on a tour of inspection, or how do you know that they are badly maintained?’

‘By guess-work.’

‘Then shall we wait to offer advice on this question too until we really know, instead of merely guessing?’

‘Perhaps this<sup>xli</sup> would be better.’ [Said Glaucon—LS]

‘Now for the silver mines [which was a major source of revenue for the city of Athens—LS] I’m sure you have not visited them, and so can’t tell why the amount derived from them has fallen.’

‘No, indeed, I have not been there.’

‘But, by Zeus,’ said Socrates,<sup>xlii</sup> ‘the district is considered unhealthy [and therefore the people leave the silver mines—LS] and so when you have to offer advice on the problem, this excuse will serve.’

‘You are joking at my expense.’<sup>xliii</sup> [Says Glaucon—LS]

‘Ah, but there is one question<sup>xliv</sup> I feel sure you have not overlooked: no doubt you have reckoned how long the corn grown in the country will maintain the population, and how much is needed annually, so that you may not be caught napping, should the city at any time be short, and may come to the rescue and relieve the city by giving expert advice about food.’

‘What an overwhelming task [said Glaucon—LS] if one has got to include such things as that in one’s duties!’

‘But, you know [says Socrates—LS] no one will ever manage even his own household successfully unless he knows all its needs and sees that they are all supplied. Seeing that our city contains more than ten thousand houses, and it is difficult to look after so many families at once, you must have tried to make a start by doing something for one, I mean your uncle’s? [Probably Charmides—LS]

‘It needs it; and if you succeed with that one, you can set to work on a larger number. But if you can’t do anything for one, how are you going to succeed with many? If a man can’t carry one talent, it’s absurd for him to try to carry more than one, isn’t it?’

‘Well [said Glaucon—LS], I could do something for uncle’s household if only he would listen to me.’

‘What? [said Socrates—LS] You can’t persuade your uncle [laughter] and yet you suppose you will be able to persuade all the Athenians, including your uncle, to listen to you? [Laughter]

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<sup>xxxix</sup> Marchant omits “that.”

<sup>xl</sup> Marchant has “No, no.”

<sup>xli</sup> Marchant has “it.”

<sup>xlii</sup> Marchant has “To be sure” and omits “said Socrates.”

<sup>xliii</sup> Marchant has “You’re chaffing me.”

<sup>xliv</sup> Marchant has “problem.”

‘Pray take care, Glaucon, that your daring ambition does not lead to a fall! Don’t you see how risky it is to say or do what you don’t understand? Think of others whom you know to be the sort of men who say or do what they obviously don’t understand. Do you think they get praise or blame by it? And think of those who understand what they say and what they do. You will find<sup>xlv</sup> that the men who are famous and admired always come from those who have the widest knowledge, and the infamous and despised from the most ignorant. Therefore, if you want to win fame and admiration in public life, try to get a thorough knowledge of what you propose to do.’”<sup>xlvi</sup>

**LS:** And so on. Now you see that is jocular, and it is much richer than appears at first reading, but Socrates gives here a sketch<sup>38</sup>—just as Aristotle does, only Aristotle doesn’t do it jocularly—[of] what political knowledge is: revenue, food one needs, guarding of the country. For reasons which would be interesting to explore, Socrates does not mention legislation, which Aristotle mentions, but<sup>39</sup> we can dismiss that.

But to come back to one point, these are the two earliest statements of political science. One thing is striking: both statements are silent on justice. I mean, I have read only excerpts, but you would see it if you would read it.<sup>40</sup> Does political science in the original sense have nothing to do with justice? Surely not. As Aristotle makes clear in the *Rhetoric*, in the passage I read, political science has to do with legislation, ya, and therefore with the distinction between good and bad laws. And here is, well, justice. Even in the case of war and peace the question of justice comes in, as you see from any political debates in Thucydides. Yes,<sup>41</sup> so the true statesman, the good statesman must then have knowledge of justice. And that is presupposed. Yes, but this knowledge is not far-fetched. Everyone has that. There are current opinions, in Athens as well as today, which tell us this; for example, there is no doubt that to steal, to cheat, to rob, to murder, are unjust actions regardless of what the law says about them. Behind it, to summarize it, justice consists in respecting what belongs to others. That is the point: to respect the other’s property. Property means of course not mere possession—these fellows who collaborated with this young man, the policemen,<sup>xlvii</sup> had in their possession radios and so their . . . obviously not their property. Yes, so property means always lawful possession. So to respect what belongs to others is clear.<sup>42</sup> That stands true even in Soviet Russia today. The question, the moot question is only whether at the limits there may not be confiscatory laws. And there is always the question: Is confiscation by law not robbery, in the . . . ? That’s a very important question. But still,<sup>43</sup> for the private man there is no question.

It is also clear that wrongdoing is to be punished, meaning that the guilty must be punished. And this implies proper judicial procedure.<sup>44</sup> Proper judicial procedure may not be available, and that is a bad law. For example, people may think they find out the criminal, the guilty, by torture, and a little reflection shows that this is not the proper way, because if I torture, not your guilt or innocence is tested but your nerves, which is an entirely different proposition. And so torture is therefore an unreasonable mean.

<sup>xlv</sup> Marchant has “you will find, I take it.”

<sup>xlvi</sup> Xenophon *Memorabilia*, trans E. C. Marchant (Loeb Classical Library) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 3.6.1-18.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Strauss might be referring to an event in Chicago at around that time.

At the beginning of the *Republic*, you get a crude notion also [of] what we all know as simple justice. One part is paying debts, naturally implied in the very idea: you got something from another fellow with the understanding that you pay back. It's clear: if you don't, you cheat. On this rule there is based this great problem of the relation of creditors and debtors, and which can lead to very great political problems, as you know from Shay as well as from Solon in Greek history.<sup>xlvi</sup> Implied is also something, a notion like a decent rate of interest if you loan money. A borrows a horse from B; he's not supposed to return two horses. But if he borrows money, an amount  $a$ , maybe he's supposed to return  $2a$ . Is it not absurd? Not absurd? So<sup>45</sup> that's really then a problem. Is not interest altogether unjust? Long discussions in Aristotle, but they are based on common sense, you know, on our primary notions. Borrowing cannot possibly mean paying back much more than you took in the first place. Or take another simple rule: "First come, first served," the idea being, if everyone is equal—either absolutely or in a certain context, ya?, as customers, for example—then not all can be served at the same time. The fairest thing is of course to give [to] him first who came first, because he took the trouble of getting up at four at in the morning and there should be some proper relation between pain taken and reward. That is a simple law of justice. Or other things; for example, from everyone according to his obligation and to everyone according to his merits. On this is based [the view] that foreigners may have to pay heavier taxes than citizens, because<sup>46</sup> they have a much greater obligation: they are protected without rendering a service, for example. Also various degrees of punishments, that you can't<sup>47</sup> punish petty theft as you can punish murder. And here an important point comes in, important for the argument of the *Apology*. What is the greatest punishment, according to—

**Student:** Death.

**LS:** Death. So what does the legislator imply<sup>48</sup> by making capital punishment the greatest punishment?

**Same Student:** This is the greatest thing to anyone.

**LS:** So life is a very great good, if not the greatest good. Ya. Life is a very great good and has to be protected by the laws. And you see how great therefore Socrates's questioning is whether life is such a good. If it is not a good, why should it be protected?

Now is this a mere assumption, that life is a good or not, an arbitrary assumption? What does Socrates tell us about it, at least up to the point we have read hitherto? What does he say? Well, his *daimonion* tells him that the desire for keeping alive is a natural inclination, and therefore the

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Shay almost certainly refers to Revolutionary war veteran Daniel Shays. Following the Revolutionary war, American states faced enormous debts and levied heavy taxes to pay for them. The debts were particularly burdensome to farmers, many of whom could not vote, and violence erupted in a number of states after the state legislatures failed to provide debt relief. In Massachusetts, Shays led groups of armed insurgents in 1786 and 1787 in an attempt to shut down civil courts and stop foreclosures of property. In Greece, under Draco's constitution loans were made on the security of the person of the borrower. Poor farmers who could not pay their debts were enslaved by the few men who controlled the land. When Solon became archon, as Aristotle describes it, he "freed the people both then and for the future by making loans on the security of a person's freedom illegal; he passed laws, and instituted a cancellation of debts both private and public." Aristotle, *The Constitution of Athens*, 6. See also Plutarch, *Life of Solon*.

legislator is right in his notion that capital punishment is the greatest punishment. But, we must add, the impulse to life is not the only natural inclination. If it were the *only* natural inclination, virtue would be merely instrumental. There would never be a question of sacrificing one's life being a virtuous action. Ya? Virtue could only be vulgar virtue, as it is called in Plato's terminology, merely instrumental.<sup>49</sup> Ya, but still, maybe that's a sound view; a simplistic utilitarianism is the only right view. Why can one not leave it at that? Why can one not leave it at the equation of virtue with vulgar virtue?

At this point we go on.<sup>50</sup> Let us turn to 32c4,<sup>xlix</sup> where we left off last time. Socrates had spoken of his just conduct under the democracy. And now he goes on. Do you have that? "And this happened while the city still was democratically ruled; but after, the oligarchy came in." Do you have that?

**Student:** Yes.

**LS:** Read on. Yes?

**Reader:**

This happened while the government was still democratic; and when the oligarchy came in, the Thirty again summoned me and four others to the Dome, and ordered us to bring Leon of Salamis from Salamis, whom they meant to put to death. Such things those people used often to do to others, wishing to make as many as possible share their guilt. Then, however, I showed again by acts, not by words, that as for death, if it is not too vulgar to use the expression, I cared not one jot, but all my anxiety was to do nothing unjust or wrong.

**LS:** "Unjust or unholy." Ya.

**Reader:**

That government did not terrify me, strong as it was, into doing injustice; but when we came out of the Dome, the other four went to Salamis and brought Leon, but I went away home. And perhaps I should have been put to death for that, if the government had not been overthrown soon. You will find many witnesses of this. (32c-e)

**LS:** Ya, thank you. He did not refer to witnesses when he spoke of his conduct in the assembly because that was a public event and this was more private. He refused to do something unjust again. Now I mention here only one point. Socrates indicates here<sup>51</sup> in these two sections [that] he was neither a democrat nor an adherent of the oligarchy. What is the alternative?

**Student:** Mixed regime.

**LS:** Ya,<sup>52</sup> that you can say, but there is also a simpler term; the primary meaning, let me say. Aristocracy, the rule of the best. Ya? The rule of the best.

**Student:** Why wasn't he a democrat?

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<sup>xlix</sup> The passage begins at 32c.



**LS:** You see what he said about the multitude in 31 and 32 beginning, that where the multitude rules, it is impossible to act justly. Ya? That's democracy.

**Student:** Isn't he the one obeying—propose the laws or break the laws?

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Isn't he following the laws which were made by other—

**LS:** Ya, but<sup>53</sup> this is characteristic of the multitude, when it gets hysterical, it disobeys its own law. He doesn't go into this matter here, but let us bear it in mind.

So aristocracy is the right thing. Rule of the best. But what is goodness? What is virtue? This shows the difficulty of the concept of virtue as merely instrumental. Aristocracy means the rule of the virtuous men, who do *not* understand virtue as instrumental but as choiceworthy for its own sake. Now this, if followed up—which is not done in the *Apology*—would lead to the broad notion of the political art, of the political science, which starts with the question: What is virtue? I.e., What is gentlemanly virtue? This is Socrates's wisdom. He declines to possess the political art in the vulgar sense, in the democratic-oligarchic sense. He doesn't care for that. But if that were understood properly, then he has it.

Now I mention a little curiosity. We know from a contemporary orator that the man who brought Leon from Salamis to Athens was a guy called Meletus. It is not certain whether he's identical with the accuser, but it is an interesting suggestion that he might have been the same fellow, and how delicate of Socrates not to say so.

**Student:** In this example, is it possible for the oligarchy to make the law in such a way that whatever they say—

**LS:** Sure!

**Same Student:** Is he following here a prior law—

**LS:** That is a very good question. That is developed by Xenophon in his *Apology*, when Socrates says he upholds the laws of Athens over and against the Thirty Tyrants.

**Same Student:** So there was a prior law, then.

**LS:** Ya, but the question is one, of course,<sup>54</sup> how shall I say, of the delicacies of political life.<sup>55</sup> Similar things existed also in Nazi Germany and other places. This notion of the sanctity of the law implies that the laws are higher than any government, but a short reflection shows that laws depend on the government, because our laws are made by a legislative assembly as a legislative assembly, that is, a regime. Ya? The law is determined by that. And that is of course underlined in the *Crito*, where the notion of the sanctity of the laws is developed and where the question arises: Can the river rise higher than the source? If the laws are the laws of the *dēmos*, made by

the *demos*, and the *dēmos* is as despicable as it is presented there, where does the sanctity of the democratic life come in? The only consistent way of doing that would be to make a distinction between the natural law, which intrinsically antedates any government, and the merely possible. That's one way of doing it. But that is at least—surely. Socrates does not here refer to the laws in this kind [of way]. And he refers to the law<sup>56</sup> when he speaks of the democracy. That is, rule of laws, which is a very good and persuasive term, is also a very difficult term. You know, it conceals also quite a [number of] problems, because laws never rule. I mean, that is a metaphoric expression. Laws must be administered and applied; in the first place, they must be laid down, and that is exactly where the political problem as distinguished from the merely legal problem comes in.

Now here he says, in this immediate sequel, where you left off—

**Reader:**

Then do you think I should have survived all these years, if I had engaged in public business, and if then I had acted as a good man should, and defended the just, and made that, as is one's duty, my chief concern? Far from it— (32e)

**LS:** Yes, now let us stop here. Socrates did nothing unjust. That was shown. But was he positively just? You see, he refused to comply with the unjust command of the tyrants, of the Thirty Tyrants, but he went home. He went home; that's all he did. He did not engage in an action to subvert these dirty fellows, as other, patriotic Athenian citizens did. Was he not concerned with self-preservation rather than with positively doing the just things? This is a criticism you'll find is developed in the first book of Cicero's *Republic*, where Cicero, or a character of Cicero's, refers to a statement of Socrates that justice consists in not injuring others.<sup>1</sup> Is this not too narrow a notion of justice? Does it not also include benefiting others? That's the problem. Now as Mr. Gildin suggested last time,<sup>57</sup> shortly before the *daimonion* was—<sup>li</sup> the context suggests this: the *daimonion* as stated here is merely negative. It keeps him from acting, keeps him back from injustice. Does it incite him to justice? And that seems to be denied. But one must also say that there is no explicit connection between the negative character of the *daimonion* and the negative character of Socrates's action regarding justice. Negative action means avoiding injustice, [which] is not the full meaning of justice.

He developed that in the sequel to this scene. We don't have to read everything. Socrates did not make anyone unjust. He takes<sup>58</sup> up the theme of corrupting the young. He did not teach anyone anything. This is rich in implication. He did not teach Strepsiades or Pheidippides in the *Clouds*. Nor did he teach Alcibiades, the great evil under the democracy, or Critias, the great evil under the oligarchy. If<sup>59</sup> someone listening to him became unjust, Socrates cannot be blamed for that, because that cannot be traced to Socrates's teaching. Ya? There were other sources for corruption around. And now let us read here a point.<sup>60</sup> That is in 33b, the end. So Socrates<sup>61</sup> did not corrupt anyone, any young man. But why did the young men come to him and enjoy being

<sup>1</sup> It is probable that Strauss's reference here is mistaken. The most likely candidate for the passage to which Strauss refers is Cicero's *De Officiis* 1.9 (§28). See also *De Officiis* 1.7 ff. (§§20 ff.) and *De Legibus* 1.12 ff. (§§33 ff.).

<sup>li</sup> There is a probable gap in audio here.

together with him if he did not corrupt them? That's the joke. Now do you have that passage? "Why do some people enjoy spending much time with me?"

**Reader:**

But why ever do some people enjoy spending a great deal of time with me?

**LS:** Ya.

**Reader:**

You have heard why, gentlemen; I have told you the whole truth, they enjoy hearing men cross-examined who think they are wise, and are not; indeed that is not unpleasant. (33b-c)

**LS:** Now let us stop here. "That's not unpleasant." So they are not attracted so much by Socrates's admonishments to virtue, but they are amused. You remember the previous description: Socrates buttonholing all and sundry. Ya? Virtue: Did you care for your virtue? And yet there is a small group of men who are spending much time with him—the others whom he buttonholes don't spend much time with him—and they spend much time with him and like it. What did they like? Listening to Socrates's sermons exalting virtue, is this pleasant? Well, is this pleasant? No. They like to listen to Socrates examining, for this was not unpleasant. That is a slight understatement. Ya.

Now let us reflect here for one moment on what light this throws on Socrates. The key thesis of the *Apology*: Socrates has only human wisdom, no true wisdom. And this wisdom consists in knowledge of his ignorance. He makes others aware of their blindness, and of course he himself was aware of his blindness. Now what does this mean, to become aware of one's blindness? That is not, naturally, meant [to be] bodily blindness. Where there was formerly a content thought to be true, there is now nothing, a blank. That's it. In the most important of things. What is the result of that, if the things which you regard as the most important things and of which you were absolutely sure it appeared you knew nothing about? The most important things. What is the result on any normal human being of that? Despair. It can't be different. Despair. Everything breaks down.

But nothing of the kind is mentioned here. What happens? The activity here is not unpleasant. How come?<sup>62</sup> How can this be not unpleasant? How can this be pleasant? Knowledge of ignorance means, as here indicated: he examined this fellow; this is a rhetorician, this is a shoemaker, this is a physician, and so on and so on. What of that? Well, one little thing. This ignorance is not the same in all cases. For example, if you take a pompous ass, that's one thing. But then you take a very simple man, who is not pretentious in any way, but without knowing it he raises enormous claims, [that] he knows.<sup>63</sup> Yes? I mean, there can also be pretentiousness in seeming simplicity, but they are two different phenomena. And you can go on. You discover various kinds of ignorance. In discovering these various kinds of ignorance, you discover the human soul. That is psychology in the original sense of the term. But as knowledge of the human soul, it is not knowledge of nothing, obviously. If we enlarge that, knowledge of the human soul, knowledge of the soul, that means, according to Plato, on the highest level: What is soul? Well, soul is that which makes a living being a living being, which enables the being to have the

principle, the origination of motion in itself. Let me leave it for the moment at this not-exact remark. But what beings are the most astonishing from this point of view of having the principle of motion in themselves, which move not by being pushed and pulled on the commonsense level<sup>lii</sup> —Thinking about the soul, there emerges a revised astronomy, no longer the astronomy of Anaxagoras, who said they are inanimate things, earth and stone. But they are animate, they have the principle of motion in themselves. But all this of course is not even alluded to in the *Apology*. The *Apology of Socrates* is perfectly compatible with Socrates being the Socrates of the *Clouds*, without Strepsiades, surely. Why is Strepsiades completely incompatible with the Socrates of the *Apology*? I mean, really in a hard-headed, practical way. What would have prevented the Strepsiades affair, according to the *Apology* rightly rendered? The *daimonion*. The daemonic thing in Socrates would have told him, “No, no, that’s not good company” [LS chuckles] by this cautious element in the *daimonion* of which I spoke before. Aristophanes made the great blunder of not considering Socrates’s *daimonion*. But more than that. So let us assume then for one moment Socrates has a kind of astronomy, whatever that might mean. That would be not enough. He must also do something. Socrates could not have merely secluded himself, because then it would also of course never have come to the trial. If he had stayed at home and walked the air there, without anyone knowing it, that would not have had any consequences.

Socrates did *not* seclude himself. The *Apology* says he . . . but admonished people to vulgar virtue, I mean, to this instrumental virtue. Now the burden of Aristophanes’s attack on Socrates was [that] while astronomy, the study of things aloft, is the best of wisdom, this is insufficient for full wisdom, because the astronomer falls into the ditch—you know, Thales looking at the sun and falling into the ditch. It lacks self-knowledge. It lacks the reflection on the meaning of astronomy in the human context, and that means especially also in the political context, the context of political society. This additional thing, which is the capstone of . . . is supplied by the Aristophanean comedy, where this blindness of the mere astronomer is corrected. In the light of the *Apology*, one could make this suggestion, that Plato says . . . No, not comedy is needed; something much better. What Socrates does or is presented as doing—buttonholing everyone, like Uncle Sam on the posters, you know [laughter], but only saying, “Did you take care of your soul today?,” like “Did you brush your teeth today?” This is extremely *comical*, this buttonholing. If we follow the rest of this, the very comical suggestion of the *Apology* is this: with “astronomy,” in quotes, the study of things aloft, which may also mean the ideas, must be capped by a comical activity, not by comedy. In Plato’s *Laws* we find this remark on that: they throw out tragedy. Tragedy is thrown out, with this reasoning: we ourselves, legislators, philosophers, are the authors of the fairest tragedy. One can say with perfect justice, “Throw out comedy.” “We,” [says] Socrates, “are the authors of the fairest comedy.”<sup>64</sup> What Socrates does to the nonphilosophers, that is genuine and that is serious, no question about that. But it cannot but be comical from the highest point of view.

Now let us go on from here, where we left off. It is not unpleasant, his activity. So in other words,<sup>65</sup> he doesn’t corrupt the young, but on the other hand he’s also not preaching virtue all the time. Ya? But he does something which is pleasing, which is enjoyable, which is amusing. Yes?

### Reader:

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<sup>lii</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

And I maintain that I have been commanded by the god to do this, through oracles and dreams and in every way in which some divine influence or other has ever commanded a man to do anything. This, gentlemen, is both true and easy to test. (33c)

**LS:** Socrates's case is different from these people who enjoy that. Socrates did not enjoy it. Ya? Socrates obeys a divine injunction. Not indeed the daemonic thing in him, because this is an injunction to *act*, to *do* something, but he owes it to oracles and dreams and all other forms of such instruction.<sup>66</sup>

And then he goes on to continue and conclude, in a way, the corruption charge. If Socrates has corrupted anyone of those with whom he conversed, let them get up and say so. Ya? That is what follows in the sequel. And he says: No one will come up, and there was never a Pheidippides whose father, Strepsiades, might say [LS chuckles], "You have corrupted my son." Doesn't exist. He mentions several of them by name. And<sup>67</sup> I do not understand all this, of course, but one thing I would like to mention to you. He mentions first people who might have been corrupted by him whose fathers are present, and then he mentions others possibly corrupted by him whose brothers are present. Now let us begin with the brothers and with Nicostratus. Ya? Nicostratus, and then Paralus, and then the last one: "And here is Adeimantus, the son of Ariston [the Adeimantus you will know from the *Republic*, ya?—LS] whose brother here, Plato. And Aiantodorus, whose brother here is Apollodorus."<sup>liii</sup> You see what Plato does? He brings himself in a special sort of compliment. Do you know who Apollodorus was?

**Student:** A rather silly follower.

**LS:** Ya. Ya, a silly, enthusiastic follower of Socrates. And that is so to say the most silly and the least silly are brought together [LS chuckles], but in the form as if they would be exactly the same thing. Yes, that is very amusing.

**Student:** Dr. Strauss?

**LS:** Ya?

**Same Student:** I wonder about the soundness of that argument, since<sup>68</sup> the ones he asked to stand up are already standing there accusing him. And the sense of . . .

**LS:** Yes, but how do you know that the accusers,<sup>69</sup> they or their sons, had been corrupted by Socrates?

**Same Student:** Well, they thought so.

**LS:** Yes, but their own son? They spoke of some young men who had been corrupted.

**Same Student:** Yes, Anytus.

**LS:** Pardon?

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<sup>liii</sup> *Apology* 33e-34a. Strauss's translation or paraphrase.

**Same Student:** Anytus's son.

**LS:** Ya, but was he corrupted? I mean, did he have anything do with Socrates—what was that? Xenophon speaks about him. What was that?

**Same Student:** Yes. Well, apparently he had spent some time with Socrates, and he ended up a drunkard, for some reason.<sup>liv</sup> [Laughter]

**LS:** Yes, but surely that . . . from Socrates.

**Same Student:** Well, his father attributes that to Socrates.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** His father attributes that to Socrates.

**LS:** Ya, but,<sup>70</sup> I mean, what—

**Same Student:** And it's elaborated. Socrates admitted that the father educating the boy in the tanner's trade wasn't doing him justice, and he switches the blame to the father, but that Socrates was somehow responsible for the boy's break with the father and break with the tanning trade and consequent alcoholism seemed to even admit it.

**LS:** Yes. Well, what should we say, then? In other words, you would say there may have been quite a few people around, fathers and older brothers, who could have said: You corrupted, you have corrupted my son or my younger brother. Ya?

**Same Student:** Yes.

**LS:** Ya. I don't know how—

**Same Student:** And specifically here, this experience [of] standing there, this business—"If anyone has had such an experience, stand up"; this is the point. They are standing there already.

**LS:** I see. I mean,<sup>71</sup> that is connected with this general question, because Socrates makes this claim that he's walking through<sup>72</sup> the streets of Athens all the time and he's buttonholing people. And somehow that doesn't sound plausible. That's . . . How can Socrates be presented to say these things to the jury? Yes? That's the great difficulty in the whole work. Ya?

**Student:** Well, one point I was wondering about: I can see why no father would want to come up and say that his son was corrupted.

**LS:** Ya, that is one point. You mean for sheer shame.

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<sup>liv</sup> Xenophon, *Apology* 30-1. Anytus's son is not named.

**Same Student:** Yes. He might want to point out someone else's son that was corrupted, but Socrates didn't sound like he asks for that.

**LS:** I see. That's a good point.

**Student:** Could this hold true for brothers?

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Could this hold true for brothers, necessarily—as much as for fathers, possibly.

**LS:** Oh. Yes. I mean, as long as there's a real connection. Do you have a brother?

**Same Student:** Yes. [Laughter]

**LS:** Would you like to admit in public that he has been corrupted? Ya, that's a good point, Mr. Jones. Ya.

**Student:** I just have a question . . . the *daimonion*. You said it is a natural capacity and referred to it as *eros*, but *eros* seems to be on the one hand a moving principle, and on the other hand something inherent, that is, in people. And in the presentation of the *daimonion* . . . it seems, it's presented as a halting, cautionary principle, and it's also presented as coming from outside, a voice of some sort. I'm wondering if you can explain this somehow.

**LS:** Yes,<sup>73</sup> I mean, the voice, that is meant to establish some connection with oracles, ya? From the outside. Ya? I mean, that is—

**Same Student:** Is it necessarily an oracle, or maybe just something divine?

**LS:** Yes, but<sup>74</sup> a voice would mean something else than [that] this individual addresses him and that connects it with the oracle. Now as for the other point you raised, it is this: the effect is only keeping back, cautionary, but what is the root for that? I mean the desire, as we indicated by the word self-preservation. The self is already there; it has only to be preserved. Ya? Whereas in the case of *eros*, [since it is] directed toward generation, [it] is [directed] toward something which is not yet there. That explains it. And it is clear that<sup>75</sup> the third point which I should mention is this: every human being has natural inclinations, but very few, if any, apart from Socrates, have the *daimonion*. And I think I spoke of that last time. It means that in the case of Socrates the natural instincts, as it would be called in modern times, were unusually powerful. Socrates had a *physis*, a nature, which in every respect fitted him for the philosophic life. I mean, not only the amazing memory and the quick mind and all the other things which he had, but also the control of the higher and the lower. Socrates could drink infinitely. Ya? The mind was unbreakable. And similarly, the instinct [for] who is fit and who is not fit. You know? And also that he has the instinct of finding out who is fit for whom: that this guy should go to Gorgias, and that should go to Protagoras, and this should become a mathematician. Ya? Intuitive certainty. Intuition. That is all implied here. I think it is not an impossible task to develop the doctrine of Socrates's

*daimonion* on the basis of Plato with perfect clarity; and as I said, the dialogue *Theages*,<sup>lv</sup> that despised thing, is one very major source because it explains the connection, which no other dialogue does, between *daimonion* and *eros*. It's the same thing, only different—<sup>lvi</sup> but<sup>76</sup> *eros* is also a common phenomenon, but to be so radically erotic, to be so incredibly sensitive to the beautiful and ugly in the soul,<sup>77</sup> that is a kind of miracle. Socrates had that. That's the claim. And therefore Socrates, when he says that he has only one art, the erotic art, that means that: an indescribable sensitivity to human differences.

**Student:** <sup>78</sup>It seems to me that it's presented again and again—I'm not familiar with the passage in the *Theages*, so can't really comment very knowledgeably on it, [but] it seems that it's presented as coming from outside him—

**LS:** Yes, sure.

**Same Student:** And that this voice is really a—

**LS:** Ya, but you must not forget the general point which I suggested. In the *Apology* the ceiling is very low, and everything is presented as close to the common understanding as possible, and whatever transcends that common understanding remains in clouds. Ya? That is perhaps not altogether—<sup>lvii</sup>

Socrates goes on. He speaks of his refusal to beg for mercy, a scene to which he returns in a moment. He's so far from begging for mercy that he incites his judges to anger against him by the way in which he refuses to beg for mercy. That was mentioned in the paper last time. Now let us look only<sup>79</sup> at 34d. Do you have that? "Then if any one of you feels like that." Ya? Do you have that?

**Reader:**

Then if any of you feels like that—I do not in the least expect it, but if he does—I may fairly say to him, "My good sir, I too have relatives of my own somewhere, for to quote Homer, no stick or stone is the origin of me, but humanity; so I have relatives and sons too, gentlemen—three of them, one a young man already, two still children—" (34c-d)

**LS:** Yes. By the way, I do not want to go into the question of Socrates's sons, because that is a test case for Socrates's concern with educating to common virtues. Socrates's sons were not in any way outstanding, you see, and the famous argument which Socrates uses: if Pericles had had the political art,<sup>80</sup> his sons would be excellent too. You know? And<sup>81</sup> his sons were notorious nobodies. The same applies *identically* to Socrates himself. That would lead us too far. But this quote from Homer, who says it to who—that says,<sup>82</sup> "What is your origin? You are not a descendant from an oak, nor from a rock."<sup>lviii</sup>

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<sup>lv</sup> Session 11.

<sup>lvi</sup> Probable gap in the tape.

<sup>lvii</sup> There might be a brief gap in the tape here.

<sup>lviii</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 19.162-163.



**Student:** According to the quote at the bottom, this is where Odysseus came back and was . . . disguised as a shepherd and spoke to his wife.

**LS:** Penelope, his wife, says it to Odysseus. So in other words, Socrates appears here in the role of Odysseus. Ya? That is his point. I wanted to make this clear only because Socrates is Achilles—you remember, earlier?—and in the *Crito* again. But here for a second, without any reference to the name of Odysseus, he reveals himself as an Odysseus.

Then a little bit later, speaking of the disgraceful character of begging for mercy and so on, he says: “Now if those of you who are reputed to be outstanding in wisdom or in manliness or in any other virtue would be such and such—would have acted in such a way, it would be a disgrace.”<sup>lix</sup> You see, wisdom and courage are here mentioned, and they are also mentioned in other passages. As far as I can see, moderation is never mentioned in the *Apology*, and that would require some understanding. And I think also not in the *Crito* but,<sup>83</sup> I mean, I have not a complete . . . so I can’t say that.

Now let us read a bit later, in the next paragraph here in my edition of the original, and . . . Yes, where was it?<sup>84</sup> Page 441, top.

**Reader:**

Apart from reputation, gentlemen, it does not seem to me right to entreat the judge, or to be acquitted by entreating; one should instruct and persuade him. For why does the judge sit? Not to make a gracious gift of justice by favour, but to decide what is just; and he has sworn not to show favour as may please him, but to judge according to the law. Then we must not get you into the habit of breaking that oath, nor must you let yourselves fall into that habit; one is as bad as the other in the sight of heaven. Then do not demand, gentlemen, that I should do before you such things as I hold neither honourable nor just nor permissible, most especially, by Zeus, for one who is prosecuted for impiety by Meletos here. (35b-c)

**LS:** Yes, let us stop here. You see, *the* charge was impiety. But the other point which I would like to mention [is that] there are <sup>85</sup>three grounds to which he refers: the honorable, as he translates, the noble or beautiful; the just; and the pious or holy. Ya? Where does the noble or honorable come in? Well, that is [the action] to which he referred at the beginning of what you read: “apart from the reputation, it is unworthy to beg.” Where does the pious or holy come in? That’s made very clear: the oath. They have sworn. So the central consideration is justice, and this we must keep in mind for the understanding [of] the sequel. Justice is the central theme of this sequel. But <sup>86</sup>I will mention only this point in advance, that in the sequel, [namely, after the condemnation],<sup>87</sup> when Socrates is asked to make a proposal regarding his punishment, he states first what he regards is just, a just retribution to him, and then he *deviates* from that in deference to the opinion of jury that he must not be rewarded but punished. Socrates deviates from the just openly. That comes after.

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<sup>lix</sup> Plato, *Apology* 35a. Strauss’s translation or paraphrase.

One word about the question of Socrates's designs on moderation. Last time, in the paper, Mr. Steintrager emphasized the provocative character of Socrates's speech, the insolence of that speech. Insolence, *hybris*, is the opposite of moderation. So that is the connection.

Now that's the end of the apology proper. Then he is condemned. He is declared to be guilty, and the question is only what punishment [he should receive]. Rabbi Weiss?

**Rabbi Weiss:** He again reiterates his belief in God in the sense in which "none of my accusers does."<sup>lx</sup>

**LS:** Absolutely. Ya, but the question is, belief is not knowledge. Ya? And in addition, what the god means is absolutely undetermined. That may very well mean Apollo in Delphi. That is undecided. I mean, the translator[s], as I say, capitalize it or put it in small letters as they see fit. But there is no such distinction in the original.

**Student:** Since it's ambiguous, and it's ambiguous earlier too in references to God when he says he assists the god, isn't it possible that he's referring not to Apollo, which might have been taken by the average person listening, but to the god that he really does believe in?

**LS:** Yes, sure,<sup>88</sup> absolutely, but the question is then *this*. Surely. I mean, that was understood in postclassical times by Christian writers and so on, that Socrates could not speak of the one god in the pagan world, and therefore there is a certain circumlocution. I mean, there are many places where he suddenly goes over from the plural, the gods, to the one god. Ya, but the question is: Apart from beliefs, how does he know? There is one developed argument—there is also an indication in the *Sophist*—but one developed argument in Plato's writings [about] how he knows that there is a god or there are gods, in the tenth book of the *Laws*.<sup>lxi</sup> And that is taken from the phenomenon of motion.<sup>89</sup> This is just as in Aristotle, the argument, the demonstration of the existence of god, a *parta motūs*, a part of motion,<sup>lxii</sup> only the arguments in the details are greatly different. But that leads at least first to the cosmic gods, the stars, and beyond them to a center. Beyond them, to one god. But Plato was not a monotheist, by the way. He may have been a henotheist, as we could say—in other words, one outstanding god—but he was not a monotheist. Ya, but there are the cosmic gods, and the *Apology* is perfectly compatible with this. You remember the discussion of Aristophanes. Therefore Anaxagoras came in, and the question of the Olympic gods, the gods worshiped by the city, is left open because Meletus said: True, <sup>90</sup>that you are a complete atheist. And then Socrates says: Well, then, you mean that I do not even recognize the gods which are recognized by all men: sun, moon, and stars? And then he says: No, you have said they are<sup>91</sup> stone and earth. And Socrates says: Who says that? Anaxagoras said that; I never said that. But this is not excluded. Socrates of the *Apology* . . . the cosmic gods.

**Same Student:** Well, could it have been then—

**LS:** And at the top of the cosmic gods, the ruler of them.

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<sup>lx</sup> 35d.

<sup>lxi</sup> Plato, *Laws* 893b-899d.

<sup>lxii</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* 8.6, 258b-260a, and *Metaphysics* 12.6-7, 1071b-1073a.

**Same Student:** Could it have been then the ruler of the cosmic gods who commanded him, as he says in a number of places, to do what he did?

**LS:** Ya, but that isn't what he said: the commandment of which he speaks is traced to the Delphic Apollo, not to—

**Same Student:** Well, since he refers ambiguously to the god—

**LS:** Ya, all right. Then—

**Same Student:** Could he have in mind—

**LS:** All right, but then how would that<sup>92</sup> highest cosmic god command him? By the soul. Ya?<sup>93</sup> The soul is so constructed that it can store knowledge. That you can say. But one point I must emphasize. Throughout the *Apology*, Socrates says that he is ignorant of the greatest things, that he does not *know* the greatest things. That is compatible with believing. Ya? But he has no perfect knowledge. That remains.

Now, as I said, we are here at the end of the *Apology* proper. Socrates's question, guilty or innocent, is answered. The<sup>94</sup> [verdict] is guilty. And there is some little thing which is quite interesting at the beginning of that. If you would read that.

**Reader:**

You have voted for my condemnation, gentlemen of Athens; and if I am not resentful at this which has been done, many things contribute to that, and particularly that I expected this to be done which has been done. Indeed, I am much rather surprised at the actual number of votes on either side. I did not expect the voting to be so close, I thought there would be a large majority; but now, as it seems, if only thirty votes had been changed, I should have been acquitted. Even now to my mind I have been acquitted of Meletos, and not only have I been acquitted, but this indeed is clear to everyone, that if Anytos and Lycon had not joined in accusing me, he would have been liable for the fine of a thousand drachmas as he did not get the fifth part of the votes. (35e-36b)

**LS:** Ya. Now<sup>95</sup> it's a little arithmetical problem and, as far as I can see, the commentators start their interpretation from a report in Diogenes Laertius, according to which 281 condemned Socrates and 220 acquitted him.<sup>lxiii</sup> But that is not obligatory, Diogenes Laertius. We have to figure that out ourselves, and we must do. Now<sup>96</sup> I tried to figure it out in the following way. Now the question is: How many votes altogether? That's not said. Let us call it  $x$ , and then figure it out. How many condemned, and how many acquitted? In other words, we must try to get an equation with one unknown, and then figure it out. Who is particularly trained in mathematics here? [Laughter] First we make the difference, ya?

**Mr. Metzel:**  $\frac{1}{2}x + 30$  and  $\frac{1}{2}x - 30$ .

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<sup>lxiii</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 2.41.

**LS:** Ya, absolutely. That's one part of the equation.<sup>97</sup> So [LS writes on the blackboard]  $x/2 + 30$  or on the other hand  $x/2 - 30$ . [Laughter] Now that doesn't give us an equation. We get the equation if we take into consideration the other observation. What does this say? That Meletus got only one-fifth, about. It's not quite exact. Now there are three accusers.

**Student:** Three-fifths.

**LS:** So I think one must make the equation, yes? [LS writes on the blackboard] Now figure it out. And see what you get. Well?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, I get three hundred as a maximum.

**LS:** Ya, well,<sup>98</sup> it cannot be quite exact, because he says something, ya, he qualifies it a bit. He says something which qualifies it; the numbers are not quite exact, but you arrive . . . from the equation at three hundred. And as far as I have been able to look up, that's perfectly compatible, that the jury could have consisted of three hundred people. I cannot solve this problem, why Plato gave us this little arithmetical problem here. I cannot solve that, but it is clearly not five hundred. It is sensible to try and figure it out. I note only this<sup>99</sup> for the moment as a mere curiosity, but I have never seen that Plato makes curiosities merely for the sake of it. It at least shows that he could count and could present an arithmetical problem, although they did not use the unknown  $x$  as we do. They would have done it probably in some form of proportion. I do not know that. Ya, let us leave it at this curiosity.<sup>100</sup>

We will not be able to finish our discussion of the *Apology*, but<sup>101</sup> let us read only the sequel a bit.

**Reader:**

Well, the man asks for the penalty of death. Good; and what penalty shall I propose against this, gentlemen? The proper penalty, it is clear surely? But what is that? What is proper for me to suffer or to pay, for not having the sense to be idle in my life, and for neglecting what most people care about, moneymaking and housekeeping and military appointments and oratory, and besides, all the posts and plots and parties which arise in this city—for believing myself to be really too honest to go after these things and survive?

**LS:** Ya. Ya, “too honest” is perhaps a bit weak. The term can mean “equitable”; it means also “too noble.” The reason why Socrates led an entirely unpolitical life was not self-preservation according to this statement, but *contempt* for the political life. It's a very strong statement, and it is perhaps not an accident that he says this after the condemnation.

**Student:** This wouldn't be limited to a democracy alone. I mean, like in the other stage he speaks about the multitude.

**LS:** <sup>102</sup>Ya, well, in any [regime] except an aristocracy proper, which there is a question whether that ever existed.<sup>103</sup> Ya, we can perhaps link this up with the *daimonion*, with the self-preservation remark in the earlier passage. The function of the *daimonion* is not so much self-

preservation—that is only the lowest level—as *eros*. And *eros* according to the Platonic understanding is vertical. It goes up to the highest, and therefore it implies the contempt for the law. Now go on.

**Reader:**

I did not go where I thought I should be of no use either to you or to myself, but I went where I hoped I might benefit each man separately with the greatest possible benefit, as I declare; I tried to persuade each one of you to take care for himself first, and how he could become most good and most wise, before he took care for any of his interests, and to take care for the state herself first before he took care of any of her interests: that in other things also, this was the proper order of his care. Then what do I deserve, since I am such as that? Something good, gentlemen, if I am to make the estimate what it ought to be in truth; and further, something good<sup>104</sup> which would be suitable for me.

**LS:** “Something good,” and we must add: and therefore not death. Ya? Go on.

**Reader:**

Then what is suitable for a poor benefactor, who craves to have leisure for your encouragement?

**LS:** “For your encouragement” to *virtue*. Ya?

**Reader:**

Nothing, gentlemen, is so suitable, as that such a man should be boarded free in the town hall, which he deserves much more than any one of you who has gained the prize at Olympia with a pair of horses or a four-in-hand: for this one makes you seem to be happy, but I make you be happy, and he is not in want for food, but I am. (36b-e)

**LS:** Now let’s stop there. You see, Socrates overstates his need for food considerably. [LS laughs] He lives in ten thousand-fold poverty. But look at this fantastic claim: Socrates is the one who makes the Athenians blessed—“happy” is a bit weak translation of the Greek word *eudaimōn*. He is responsible for the greatest benefit. No wonder that he looks down on the political life. I mean, you know, the general is in between this prizewinner and Socrates. You know . . . What would then be a just retribution for Socrates? Yes? And he says this: to be entertained in the *prytaneion*, in the town hall. Ya? Go on.

**Reader:**

Perhaps you think that in saying this, very much as I spoke of appeals for pity—

**LS:** No, before. You didn’t read the—

**Reader:** Oh.

Then if I must estimate the just penalty according to my deserts, this is my estimate: free board in the town hall.

**LS:** Ya,<sup>105</sup> that would be a just retribution. Ya, now?

**Reader:**

Perhaps you think that in saying this, very much as I spoke of appeals for pity, I am just showing off; no such thing, gentlemen; I will tell you what I mean. I am convinced that I never willingly wronged anyone—

**LS:** Now let's stop here for a moment. Socrates has first said what is a just retribution. And then he says, in almost as many words, that he will *deviate* from the just in deference to the multitude. In a very strict sense, he commits an unjust act. He deviates from the strictly just. Yes?

**Reader:**

But I cannot convince—

**LS:** <sup>106</sup>Ya, "I am convinced that."

**Reader:**

I am convinced that I never willingly wronged anyone, but I cannot convince you, for we have conversed together only a short time. If we had a law, as other people have, that a trial for life or death is to be spread over many days—

**LS:** Yes, excuse me. This "we have not conversed a long time" [or "we have conversed only] a short time" [is] "we did not have a conversation, a dialogue, except for a short time." The *Apology* is a dialogue, a dialogue with the *dēmos*, the only dialogue with the *dēmos*. But it is as dialogic in the deeper sense of the word as any other Platonic dialogue, a dialogue being a conversation where the speaker adapts his speech to the capacity of the addressed. Ya? And then? Yes?

**Reader:**

If we had a law, as other people have, that a trial for life or death is to be spread over many days and not confined to one, I think you would have been convinced. (36e-37b)

**LS:** You see—I note this point. I think we leave it at that today. Socrates suggests that the Athenian law is bad. He criticizes the Athenian law. In a crude way, that was an act of injustice. You ought to comply with the law, not to criticize it. At least not, certainly not in such circumstances.

Ya, I think we have to stop here, because it is clear that the true retribution is unacceptable and Socrates must therefore postpone a punishment. And therefore the question arises: What is an evil? What is an evil? This question of the greatest things, knowledge of the greatest things, comes up again. We will see here that in the sequel we learn that prison is a true evil. Whether death is an evil has remained uncertain, but prison is a true evil. And why is it a true evil according to that statement? Because freedom is a good. And that is connected with Socrates's earlier remark, you know, this proud remark: It would be beneath me to do that. Freedom in the simple sense, where it means that you are not prevented from circulation, is akin to freedom in the inner and higher sense, not to be dependent in your thoughts on the opinion of other people.

And therefore<sup>107</sup> freedom and this kind of pride that goes with that, that comes out in this, especially in this part.

But<sup>108</sup> next time we will discuss the rest of the *Apology*.<sup>lxiv109</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted “what.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “that they.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “and—.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “The real—.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “which—.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “that the—.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “What he calls social—.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “He—I—if you look at it—.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “as—.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “to come back to the—.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “is—.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “to the clever—.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “on page—.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “here is—how—.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “he has—.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “than—.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “. And that—.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “the law—.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “but the penal law.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “had—.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “as.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “So..”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “Socrates—.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “You can—.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “you—.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “It’s more—.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “and not only—I mean,.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “Greeks have—.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “the—.”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “Where do we—.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “of that in this—.”

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “The—.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “the aquiline—.”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted “—but.”

<sup>35</sup> Deleted “have—.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “, but—.”

<sup>37</sup> Deleted “should give—.”

<sup>38</sup> Deleted “of what—.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “that is—.”

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “Why then—.”

<sup>41</sup> Deleted “but what—.”

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “Everyone—.”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “for that—.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “This—that—.”

<sup>45</sup> Deleted “it is—.”

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<sup>lxiv</sup> The session concludes with Strauss making a few remarks about student papers for the next session. These remarks have been deleted from the transcript.

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- <sup>46</sup> Deleted “they invested—.”  
<sup>47</sup> Deleted “pay—.”  
<sup>48</sup> Deleted “by making punishment—.”  
<sup>49</sup> Deleted “Why—.”  
<sup>50</sup> Deleted “Socrates—.”  
<sup>51</sup> Deleted “that he is neither—.”  
<sup>52</sup> Deleted “but—was a—but what was a—.”  
<sup>53</sup> Deleted “that—what he makes is—.”  
<sup>54</sup> Deleted “—you see, that is one of—.”  
<sup>55</sup> Deleted “You have—.”  
<sup>56</sup> Deleted “in the democratic—.”  
<sup>57</sup> Deleted “there seems—the context—.”  
<sup>58</sup> Deleted “the—.”  
<sup>59</sup> Deleted “something—.”  
<sup>60</sup> Deleted “In—.”  
<sup>61</sup> Deleted “does not—.”  
<sup>62</sup> Deleted “How can this be—.”  
<sup>63</sup> Changed from “what he all knows.”  
<sup>64</sup> Deleted “What the—.”  
<sup>65</sup> Deleted “that is not—.”  
<sup>66</sup> Deleted “Now—.”  
<sup>67</sup> Deleted “that—I mean, I do not—one thing is—.”  
<sup>68</sup> Deleted “they—.”  
<sup>69</sup> Deleted “have been—or.”  
<sup>70</sup> Deleted “you can—what does it—.”  
<sup>71</sup> Deleted “that traces altogether—.”  
<sup>72</sup> Deleted “the cities of Athens—.”  
<sup>73</sup> Deleted “that is—.”  
<sup>74</sup> Deleted “a voice is—.”  
<sup>75</sup> Deleted “—the other point which—.”  
<sup>76</sup> Deleted “not—.”  
<sup>77</sup> Deleted “which, ya?”  
<sup>78</sup> Deleted “I still don’t think—.”  
<sup>79</sup> Deleted “at one—.”  
<sup>80</sup> Deleted “he would have—ya?.”  
<sup>81</sup> Deleted “and it applies.”  
<sup>82</sup> Deleted “You are not—.”  
<sup>83</sup> Deleted “I have not—.”  
<sup>84</sup> Deleted “75—.”  
<sup>85</sup> Deleted “three reasons”  
<sup>86</sup> Deleted “before.”  
<sup>87</sup> Changed from “But before—I will mention only this point in advance, so that you will—in the sequel, Socrates—namely after the condemnation.”  
<sup>88</sup> Deleted “but the question—.”  
<sup>89</sup> Deleted “just as—.”  
<sup>90</sup> Deleted “he says.”  
<sup>91</sup> Deleted “fire—.”  
<sup>92</sup> Deleted “cosmic—.”  
<sup>93</sup> Deleted “By—.”  
<sup>94</sup> Deleted “question.”  
<sup>95</sup> Deleted “; that is—.”  
<sup>96</sup> Deleted “I think—.”  
<sup>97</sup> Deleted “But—.”  
<sup>98</sup> Deleted “—I mean, it—pardon?.”  
<sup>99</sup> Deleted “as an—.”  
<sup>100</sup> Deleted “And let us—yes, we will have to—.”



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<sup>101</sup> Deleted “we—.”

<sup>102</sup> Deleted “No, I think that he—.”

<sup>103</sup> Deleted “The function—.”

<sup>104</sup> Deleted “which ought—.”

<sup>105</sup> Deleted “that’s a just—.”

<sup>106</sup> Deleted “No—.”

<sup>107</sup> Deleted “freedom is really—.”

<sup>108</sup> Deleted “we have then—.”

<sup>109</sup> Deleted “And if we have still time, as I am reasonably sure, we will be dependent, it was, as...the other gentlemen will have their papers.”

### Session 13: no date

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —begin our discussion of the *Crito*.<sup>1</sup> Now let us first conclude the discussion of the *Apology*. We were in the middle, or at the end of the second speech after the condemnation but before the precise punishment was established. That was the procedure. Now where is that? That would be on page 442 or thereabouts. Ya, in the second paragraph on 442. The context, to repeat: Socrates is condemned. The punishment proposed by the accusers is death, but this is still to be decided. Socrates is allowed according to Athenian law to make a counterproposal. And the counterproposal first was what Socrates *deserves* according to justice. That would be a signal *honor*, and not punishment. But then of course Socrates knows that this is not feasible, and so he deviates from the just and he makes proposals for something which would be generally regarded as a punishment. And this is the place where we stopped last time. Now if, I think, someone would just begin on page 442, the paragraph. Do you have it?

**Reader:** “Perhaps you think me stubborn and arrogant”?

**LS:** Ya.

**Reader:**

Perhaps you think me stubborn and arrogant in what I am saying now, as in what I’ve said about the entreaties and tears. It is not so, Athenians. It is rather that I am convinced that I never wronged any man voluntarily, though I cannot persuade you of that, since we have talked together only a little time. If there were a law in Athens, as there is elsewhere, not to finish a trial of life and death in a single day, I think that I could have persuaded you; but now it is not easy in so short a time to clear myself of great prejudices. But when I am persuaded that I have never wronged any man, I shall certainly not wrong myself, or admit that I deserve to suffer any evil, or propose any evil for myself as penalty. Why should I? Lest I should suffer the penalty which Meletus proposes when I say that I do not know whether it is a good or an evil? Shall I choose instead of it something which I know to be an evil, and propose that as a penalty? Shall I propose imprisonment? And why should I pass the rest of my days in prison, the slave of successive officials? Or shall I propose a fine, with imprisonment until it is paid? I have told you why I will not do that. I should have to remain in prison, for I have no money to pay a fine with.

**LS:** So<sup>2</sup> a fine would be the same as prison. Ya?

**Reader:**

Shall I then propose exile? Perhaps you would agree to that. Life would indeed be very dear to me— (37a-c)<sup>i</sup>

**LS:** Now let us perhaps stop here for the time being and then go on. So to repeat, then, the reward which Socrates proposes is unacceptable. He must propose a punishment, an evil. He

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<sup>i</sup> Plato, *Apology*, in *Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito*, trans. F. J. Church., rev., Robert D. Cumming (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1956), 44.

cannot propose death, for the simple reason that he does not know whether death is an evil, you see, so he must propose something which he knows to be an evil. Socrates knows that prison, fine, and banishment would be evils. First of all, prison and fine would be [the same]: a fine is reduced to prison, because he can't pay. So why is prison an evil? Answer: because it means deprivation of freedom. Freedom.<sup>3</sup> Freedom, wealth, and being at home are good things. And it is made clear in the case of prison why that is an evil, because to be subject, a slave to someone else, is an evil. Now from here we understand also why death is not simply good, because life without freedom, and of complete destitution and in exile, may be more miserable than death. That is another consideration.

But there is another point which we must understand. Socrates says first, "I have never voluntarily injured" or "hurt" or "done injustice to a man," and later on, a little bit later he says: "I have never injured" or "done injustice to anyone." The latter is a much larger claim. He has not even involuntarily or unwittingly injured or done injustice to another man. Ya, but what about Socrates's famous claim that no one does voluntarily evil? You remember that all sins are due to ignorance and therefore aren't voluntary. That creates a certain difficulty. What solution would you suggest? Well, there is one very simple solution: that Socrates very frequently shifts from one level to the other. And there is of course a commonsense level in which one can and must speak of deliberate murder, let me say, ya, and malice aforethought and involuntary homicide. So that is always possible, to say that Socrates speaks sometimes simply commonsensically but also sometimes on a deeper level.<sup>4</sup> The two levels are that of the political life, which stands and falls by punishment, and a deeper reflection which makes questionable the political life, because<sup>5</sup> if all errors, all sins, all crimes are involuntary, there cannot be punishment, there can only be instruction. Ya? You see, that throws light on our present discussion, because present-day liberalism is an attempt to bring out on the political level what according to Socrates's point of view cannot be brought out on the political level. You know? Do you see it in this case? Is this intelligible, what I said?

**Student:** Do you mean liberalism or social science—

**LS:** Yes, well,<sup>6</sup> I mean, liberalism is a much broader thing than social science. It's not simply identical. No, but you know the people who really in fact deny responsibility and try to trace any criminal action or criminal inclination to something beyond the control of the individual, ya<sup>7</sup>—and that is of course underlying all attempts to reduce punishment or to make it<sup>8</sup> less and less punitive and more and more rehabilitative, if I may say so. There is something which that has in common with Socrates. Ya? But only for Socrates there is this crucial difference.<sup>9</sup> Socrates implies that if you make an application of a profound truth to political matters, you have to modify that profound truth. It cannot be politically true—I use now Burke's well-known expression: in proportion as these things are metaphysically true, they are politically untrue.<sup>ii10</sup> I think that is really a crucial point, because the whole notion that there can be a wholly rational society all of whose members are enlightened men is the background of liberalism. I mean, there are very few liberals who would assert it in this way, but that is somehow the background. For Socrates, that's impossible: a *polis*, a society, is necessarily not enlightened. Only a very small

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<sup>ii</sup> See, to cite an edition readily available to Strauss, Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event*, ed. William B. Todd (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1959), 74. This is paragraph 99.

part of it can be enlightened. The *polis* as a whole is not enlightened, and therefore the metaphysical truths, if you call it that way, are not susceptible of being directly, immediately politically relevant, politically true.<sup>11</sup> You know that the *Apology* is one of the favorite documents of<sup>12</sup> certain generous liberals. Ya? And that is not entirely unfounded, but we must also see the difference. We must also see the difference. Mr. Kendrick?

**Mr. Kendrick:** Why does he shift?

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Kendrick:** Why does he make the shift? Why does he cover himself like that? In this argument, if he never voluntarily harmed anyone, if he never harmed anyone, he can't be punished.

**LS:** Yes, but that is a different question, ya?, because that is not a question<sup>13</sup> regarding all men, but Socrates in particular.<sup>14</sup> I mean, that's an entirely different issue than the one we discussed up to now. Is this clear to you? Because<sup>15</sup> one doesn't have to say that no one voluntarily does evil in order to say this individual never voluntarily did evil. That's clear, that's a special case. Now, so what was your question, then?

**Mr. Kendrick:** Why does he need both arguments?

**LS:** He makes use here only of one argument, namely, regarding himself. In this connection, where the question is of his punishment, he says: Am I guilty? He has to answer this question. And he says: No, I'm not guilty.<sup>iii</sup>

**Student:** . . . teaches them something, something at least that they were sure of before and are not so sure of now. But this in a way places them under tutelage, which could be translated as a deprivation of liberty, could it not? And in this sense—

**LS:** You are very liberal, I believe. I mean, then in other words, to become more reasonable—pardon?

**Same Student:** No, no. That's not my stand. It's a question.

**LS:** I know, but it sounds so. But<sup>16</sup> I believe very few people implied before you that to become more sensible is a deprivation of liberty.

**Same Student:** This is the way these people react. I mean, they're angry about something, and could it not be this?

**LS:** Ya.<sup>17</sup> I mean, you may be right. But that would need some argument. What is their first reaction? I mean, if we take seriously what he said, that's an accusation of impiety. And Socrates therefore is accused not of having interfered with the freedom of anyone, but with having violated the most sacred. Ya? How do you go on from here? Where does the interference with

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<sup>iii</sup> The original transcriber notes that it is probable that a section of tape is missing here.

freedom come? Freedom is understood by these people in a very simple way: that anyone who would deprive them of their voting rights and their other civic rights would be accused of being a tyrant or a potential tyrant. That was not suggested in the *Apology*. Or do you mean to say that to the extent to which Socrates implies that the only one who really deserves to have civic rights is a wise man, to that extent he makes an attack on their liberty? Did you mean that?

**Same Student:** Umm.

**LS:** In other words, that would be a defensible position. Also if you think of the other Platonic dialogues, to the extent to which Socrates says only the experts can judge. Ya?

**Same Student:** Well, there's a problem, because along these same lines he says that he is also under a tutelage, I mean, at least under the gods and . . .

**LS:** Ya, but still, this tutelage is a very high freedom, isn't it? What do you imply, then? What do you understand by freedom?

**Same Student:** Well, all I can say is it's sort of a negative description; if there is such a thing it is not . . .

**LS:** No,<sup>18</sup> I think what you say is very important, although I believe the formulas which you have come to are not clear enough. I mean, does not every freedom presuppose a previous bondage, to state it quite clearly? Can freedom be the first premise? Can it? That's a very good question. You see, <sup>19</sup>if you take a very common older view, that there are certain natural rights of men, basic for humans, how they are derived—I mean, I take now not such an extreme view but a more common view: they are derived from a previous natural law. You have these freedoms as a gift. As a gift: not something that you can claim. I know that modern libertarianism has a tendency to conceive of freedom as *the* beginning, as the absolute beginning of any moral argument. But that creates great difficulties. Sooner or later you have to make a distinction between freedom and license, for example. Now<sup>20</sup> you can try to make the distinction as follows, as Montesquieu tried, to say: freedom implies the obligation to recognize that same freedom in every other man. Freedom means an order in which the freedom of all is recognized. License means a claim to freedom not limited by the recognition of the same freedom of all. That one can try to do. But is it not so that if man is a free being—if man is a free being, has he made that freedom? Has he made that?<sup>21</sup> And even if you say, as some people say: We conquered freedom; originally we were brutes, ya, and some sort of higher monkeys, and we *made* ourselves free by our own efforts. But even granting that for argument's sake, was this capacity which the monkeys do not possess and not something with which man started, which he did not acquire: must we not always presuppose some “quote gift”? I mean, you know, you can take this in a modern expression as the premise of anything which man can then do, acquire, etc. I would like to know what was the specific point in the *Apology of Socrates* which induced you to raise the question.

**Same Student:** Well, the question of deprivation of freedom to being truly a punishment . . . it's hard to see how . . .

**LS:** Yes, I see now. What Socrates means is not so very deep; that's something very simple. I mean, he says this: whether death is an evil or a good is really a difficult question. Some people are better off when dead. And Socrates includes himself, of course. Ya? But that a sensible human being is worse off if bossed around by a vicious fool—because that fellow in jail is not likely to be an enlightened sage, you know—that he's worse off than if he can circulate and decide what is he going to do, then it seems to be commonsensically true; and I think some of us who would not believe it should experimentally try it in a jail, and I think they will come up to that and would see that.

Ya,<sup>22</sup> but if you want to go into a deeper stratum, then you can of course say this: what Socrates here means by freedom in the simple sense, the commonsensical sense, is linked up indeed with what he claims. The highest thing for man according to him is to philosophize. But that is the highest form of freedom. But this really has its inner law: to seek the truth. I mean, that's not just, "Say what you want, anything which comes to your head." That's not philosophy. Or saying "that's . . . That is the difference—an impudent assertion and not philosophy, surely. To that extent, in this sense it's freedom. And this freedom, of course, is denied by the *polis*. We have seen this passage where Socrates says: You might acquit me, with the proviso that I give up my philosophizing. Now in the clearest case, there will be now a formal law in Athens: philosophizing is strictly forbidden. And Socrates says, "I would not comply," because he couldn't give it up. Philosophizing is, as Socrates understands it, something which cannot be regulated by the *polis*. That is not quite the same thing as modern liberalism means, because Socrates would say there is no question that tragedy and comedy can and ought to be regulated. This he says very clearly. Ya? We have the case of Jack Paar<sup>iv</sup> [laughter] and so, and [that] this is something which is susceptible of being regulated by the *polis* I think is clear. That it was different, an opportunity for . . . But philosophy cannot be. Well, I mean, in other words, think of science, the position regarding<sup>23</sup> Lysenko.<sup>v</sup> Yes? It's wholly irrelevant, incompetent, immaterial, the idea that the government as such should be able to speak competently on biology. But it can very well speak competently about what is conducive to public morality in such performances as those of Mr. Paar.<sup>24</sup> So you can say the common freedom, which Socrates claims to be good, is related in his mind to the highest form of freedom. Now that's philosophizing. Because that freedom means not merely the freedom to circulate but it means also<sup>25</sup> the innermost freedom. You see, the freedom to circulate doesn't mean much if you are a slave of human beings, of . . . citizens. Ya? Then you are in one sense free; in another sense you are a slave. But the true freedom is of course freedom of the mind. To that extent, that is linked up. But the explicit problem here is only with this commonsensical thing, that to be jailed—to be jailed—is surely generally speaking an evil. There are extreme cases where this must be good. There are cases where people try to go to jail. For example, that was a safe place in Nazi Germany for some people because, you know, since they were common criminals, they were not suspected of conspiracy against the regime. They were safe. And there were also other cases in Germany, I remember, in pre-Hitlerian times when, say, a shepherd committed a minor misdemeanor in order to spend the winter well-fed and well-housed in the jail, you see. But still, that doesn't do away with the fact that generally speaking jail is undesirable.

<sup>iv</sup> Jack Paar was the host of *The Tonight Show* from 1957-1962. Strauss likely refers to a censorship dispute that occurred between him and the network in February of 1960, while this course was in progress.

<sup>v</sup> See session 6, n. liv.

Now let us continue where we left off, because we should really try to finish this discussion. Yes, where we were?

**Reader:** “Shall I propose imprisonment?” No—

**LS:** No, “Shall I propose exile.” Yes?

**Reader:**

Perhaps you would agree to that. Life would indeed be very dear to me if I were unreasonable enough to expect that strangers would cheerfully tolerate my discussions and arguments when you who are my fellow citizens cannot endure them, and have found them so irksome and odious that you are seeking now to be relieved of them. No, indeed, Athenians, that is not likely. A fine life I should lead for an old man if I were to withdraw from Athens and spend<sup>vi</sup> the rest of my days in wandering from city to city, and continually being expelled. For I know very well that the young men will listen to me wherever I go, as they do here. If I drive them away, they will persuade their elders to expel me; if I do not drive them away, their fathers and other relatives will expel me for their sakes.

**LS:** That is of course a description to the Athenians [of] what they have been doing to him. Ya? Ya, so that is a sketch of the argument of the *Crito*, as you can see, why exile is not a possibility. Now, ya, we have to read the immediate sequel.

**Reader:**

Perhaps someone will say, “Why cannot you withdraw from Athens, Socrates, and hold your peace?”

**LS:** “Withdraw from Athens?” That is not in here. “Withdraw from Athens?” No, no. I mean, you know,<sup>26</sup> “after you got out,” meaning from jail. In other words: “Could you not, after having been acquitted,<sup>27</sup> keep silent and still?” Yes?

**Reader:**

It is the most difficult thing in the world to make you understand why I cannot do that.

**LS:** “Some of you.” Yes, “some of you.” Yes?

**Reader:**

If I say that I cannot hold my peace because then<sup>vii</sup> that would be to disobey the god, you will think that I am not in earnest and will not believe me.

**LS:** Yes. No,<sup>28</sup> “you would not believe me, thinking that I’m speaking ironically.” Speaking ironically.<sup>29</sup> Some of you will not believe that Socrates cannot remain silent and keep rest. They regard his assertion that he obeys the god as ironic. Therefore Socrates has to give another reason

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<sup>vi</sup> Church has “pass.”

<sup>vii</sup> Church omits “then.”

which no one can regard as ironical. You remember this suspicion, that this might be ironical, has also occurred to some contemporaries, some of us, when we read it. Ya? Just like the *Theages*, which I mentioned to you, when Socrates gives first the reason for not accepting a certain young man as a student, saying: Well, I'm an erotic; the only thing I know is eroticism. And then they say this is crazy, and then he says: No, the *daimonion*, that prevents me. That terrific thing, you know? That they believe him. Now here the order is inverted. What does he say? What is the reason which no one can regard as ironical?

**Reader:**

And if I tell you that no greater good can happen to a man than to discuss human excellence every day and the other matters about which you have heard me arguing and examining myself and others, and that an unexamined life is not worth living, then you'll believe me still less. (37c-38a)

**LS:** So in other words,<sup>30</sup> Socrates is compelled to refer to the Delphic god because the true reason is wholly unbelievable. That's the heart of the point he makes, ya? The true reason is the philosophic life is the greatest good. And in what does it consist, the philosophic life as described here?

**Mr. Metzel:** Self-knowledge.

**LS:** <sup>31</sup>Here is another description: to make speeches on virtue, about virtue. Not *admonition* to virtue, but raising questions: What is virtue? That is the point. That is the reason why Socrates cannot change, because he is certain that the philosophic life is the best life, the highest good. How does he *know* that the philosophic life is best? How does he know that? You remember, we came always back to this question: What does Socrates know? How does he know? I would<sup>32</sup> give this answer: He knows it fundamentally in the same way in which he knows that freedom in this crude sense, not being jailed, is in principle preferable to being jailed. By starting from this obvious phenomenon and reflecting then on the meaning of freedom, whether this freedom as mere absence of external impediments to motion really exhausts what we mean by freedom, and then we come to certain observations—for example, that men who are other-directed and can circulate are unfree people because they are directed by someone else—and then we see that there is a kind of freedom which is much higher.

I think we leave it at this point.<sup>33</sup> Now there is the deliberation of the jury, and Socrates is condemned to death. Socrates makes then a speech first which is addressed to the condemners, and then a speech addressed to the acquitters. I summarize what he says to the condemners. He makes three points. First: It would have been wiser for you to wait a bit, for I'm close to death. He's seventy. Secondly: "I have not been caught by the condemners on account of lack of speaking ability, of speeches," but because he lacked daring, impudence, namely, "I didn't dare to say or do things which would disgrace me." In other words, "I was afraid of badness rather than of death." And the third point he makes is a prophecy: I shall be avenged by people younger than myself.

Now the crucial point is, I think: What is Socrates's lack of daring? What does that mean? We can use a better term to make the problem clear. What is Socrates's sense of shame? What is his



shame? If we look at the *Apology* as a whole, what is Socrates's sense of shame? How does it show? I mean, surely also that he doesn't do these disgraceful things, crying and appealing to the compassion of the judges, but the book is in a much more profound sense a document of Socrates's sense of shame. You remember I said more than once that the characteristic of the book is the low ceiling. The true meaning of philosophy does not appear. It appears only to the extent to which it could be intelligible to the average Athenian citizen. That is a kind of sense of shame. He conceals the true character of philosophy. We must see whether this is not of some pertinence for the later discussion.

Then he addresses the acquitters, and here he makes it clear that he will tell them myths.<sup>viii</sup> He didn't say anything of this kind when speaking to the condemners. Why does he tell them myths? Because they believe in myths. But you must always remember that this is addressed the acquitters. Do the condemners not believe in myths? In the speech which he addresses to the condemners, he doesn't say a word about the gods<sup>34</sup>, nor of Hades, whereas the speech to the acquitters [contains] at least four references to the gods and of course of Hades. So Socrates creates here an impression which is borne out by an explicit remark: the condemners are the unbelievers, the acquitters are the believers. But in what sense? Surely in this sense: that the condemners do not believe in Socrates's belief, whereas the acquitters believe in Socrates's belief. They are the friends of Socrates, whereas the condemners are his enemies. Now we begin to read in 40c; that is on page 445, the paragraph—

**Reader:**

And if we reflect in another way—

**LS:** Ya.

**Reader:**

we shall see that we may well hope that death is a good. For the state of death is one—  
(40c)

**LS:** No, that is only a little bit before, if you will read the preceding sentence. Well, he mentions the fact that the *daimonion* did not resist Socrates, did not oppose (a) his going to the trial, and (b) to his making the speech<sup>35</sup> which . . . he . . . made. From this it would seem to follow that here—now read this last sentence before the sentence you began, please. “A great testimony of that has occurred to me.” Yes?

**Reader:**

This thing that has come upon me must be a good; and those of us who think that death is an evil— (40b)

**LS:** No, no, before.

**Reader:** Before that?

**LS:** Ya, at the end of the preceding paragraph.

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<sup>viii</sup> The word used (at 39e) is *diamythologēsai*.

**Reader:**

But now, in this matter—

**LS:** Yes.

**Reader:**

it has never once opposed me, either in my words or my actions. (40b)

**LS:** Yes, “If I did not wish”—no, “if I was not about to do something good.”<sup>ix36</sup> This seems to imply that here the *daimonion* is presented as inciting to good actions. You remember that before it was only presented as preventing bad actions. Never inciting. Ya.<sup>37</sup> And now go on where you started.

**Reader:**

And if we reflect in another way, we shall see that we may well hope that death is a good. For the state of death is one of two things: either the dead man wholly ceases to be and loses all consciousness or, as we are told, it is a change and a migration of the soul to another place.

**LS:** Ya. Now let us understand this. Death is no evil. That’s a thesis to be proved, for either it is perfect absence of sensing—he<sup>x</sup> says consciousness—of any awareness, or else it is transmigration of the soul. In both cases he is going to prove death is a good. So Socrates is no longer ignorant as to whether death is good, as he has claimed throughout. Now he claims to possess knowledge of the fact that death is good. And now let us see how the argument runs.

**Reader:**

And if death is the absence of all consciousness, and like the sleep of one whose slumbers are unbroken by any dreams, it will be a wonderful gain. For if a man had to select that night in which he slept so soundly that he did not even dream, and had to compare it with all the other nights and days of his life, and then had to say how many days and nights in his life he had spent better and more pleasantly than this night, I think that a private person, nay, even the Great King of Persia himself, would find them easy to count, compared with the others. If that is the nature of death, I for one count it a gain. For then it appears that all time is nothing more than a single night.

**LS:** Ya. Stop here. That’s a proof that death is a good, on the one alternative. Ya? Complete unconsciousness, complete unawareness, is a good. What do you say to that?

**Student:** Hasn’t he denied this philosophically?

**LS:** I should say so. I mean, if philosophizing is the greatest good, then this is surely the very opposite, because that is even lower than the awareness of the most stupid fellow. Sure. That’s

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<sup>ix</sup> *Apology* 40c.

<sup>x</sup> That is, the translator.

one point. And think also of the gadfly: the gadfly; that is a good activity. The gadfly is awakening Athenians, ya?, arousing them from their sleep. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:** But could this not be brought on by the suffering that life is? And beyond life, would no sufferings leave no awareness? There is no need for philosophy.

**LS:** Surely not. But the question is,<sup>38</sup> for this reason, because there is no need and no possibility of philosophy, whether it is not entirely inferior to life. Otherwise—

**Student:** Well, he doesn't say that it's the greatest good. It's just that it's—

**LS:** No, he says: Compare this night with all days and nights—with all other days and nights, meaning also those days and nights when you philosophize—and this is still better. Now let us first see how he argues out the other alternative, in the sequel.

**Reader:**

But if death is a journey to another place, and what we are told is true—that all who have died are there—what good could be greater than this, my judges? Would a journey not be worth taking, at the end of which, in the other world, we should be delivered from the pretended judges here and should find the true judges who are said to sit in judgment below, such as Minos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus, and the other demigods who were just in their own lives? Or what would you not give to converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? I'm willing to die many times if this be true. And for my own part I should find it wonderful to meet there Palamedes, and Ajax the son of Telamon, and the other men of old who have died through an unjust judgment, and to compare my experiences with theirs. That I think would be no small pleasure. And, above all, I could spend my time in examining those who are there, as I examine men here, and in finding out which of them is wise, and which of them thinks himself wise when he is not wise. What would we not give, my judges, to be able to examine the leader of the great expedition against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus—

**LS:** Sisyphus. Sisyphus.<sup>xi</sup>

**Reader:**

Sisyphus, and<sup>xii</sup> countless other men and women whom we could name? It would be an inexpressible happiness to converse with them and to live with them and to examine them. Assuredly there they do not put men to death for doing that. For besides the other ways in which they are happier than we are, they are immortal, at least if<sup>39</sup> what we are told is true. (40c-41c)

**LS:** Ya. So in other words, that would be much better. It would be better because—why? Because you don't have to fear death anymore. The indication is that death is an evil. Now let me develop that. In the latter case, we go into Hades, ya?, the company of the just demigods, in the first place.<sup>40</sup> Socrates only alludes to that. He's very delicate: that since all dead men are there,

<sup>xi</sup> Strauss corrects the student's mispronunciation.

<sup>xii</sup> Church has "or."

also the unjust ones [are there]. So there is, in other words, also a compartment<sup>41</sup> for the unjust—you know, hell. But he doesn't speak of that, because he is absolutely sure he will not go to hell. He has led a just life. But<sup>42</sup> for *those* death would be worse than life, ya, for those going to the other compartment. But<sup>43</sup> the accusers will be punished there, you see; they go there. And of course the poets: the poets are naturally a different class than the just demigods. Whether he also means they are different from the just men, that is left entirely open. And the third class are the unjustly condemned. Whether any of these individuals mentioned here is wise or not is a question. Socrates wants to find out by talking to them. Ya? And with a view to this question, he mentions in particular Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Sisyphus. Agamemnon he does not mention by name, but he's obviously meant.

The perfect happiness, *eudaimonia*, bliss in life after death consists in examining. Ya? And he says so.<sup>44</sup> In doing exactly there what Socrates has been doing here, this life which he leads as a living being is then capable of perfect happiness, only he doesn't have so many terribly bright fellows around as he would find there. That is some difference, but otherwise they're the same. And of course there is this additional boon, that death is no longer to be feared, which implies, to repeat, that death in itself is an evil. Ya?

There is another point, the only objection to this. Why does he not say, "That's it, that's the proof<sup>45</sup> that death is not to be feared"? Why does he not leave it at that? Why does he say that? You see, he has a twofold, a two-pronged argument to prove that death is not an evil.<sup>46</sup> This is a very much stronger proof, isn't it? You are in the best company, and you can do the finest things you did in this life still better because you have no longer to fear any interruption by death. Why does he not leave it at that?

**Student:** Because . . .

**LS:** "If the stories are true." "If the stories are true," he always says. So therefore he cannot really know in which way death is good. Is it good because it is complete senselessness or because it's the opposite of complete senselessness, namely, complete awakensness? But since this is undecided, the question of whether awakensness or senselessness is undecided, and since awakensness is philosophy, the question of whether philosophy is the greatest good or it is not is also left open. That is of course a big joke.

Now the argument here reminds of a later argument in Plato's dialogue, the *Statesman*, where the story of the Golden Age is presented and in glowing pictures, and yet the philosopher there—it's not Socrates—says: We don't know whether this is a desirable condition, where the men have everything in abundance, because we don't know what men *did* with that abundance. If they used it for philosophizing, then it was really wonderful; but if they merely were sitting around and told each other jokes or, I don't know, played bridge, then it is nothing to be admired.<sup>xiii</sup> So that is of course what goes through. Socrates knows somehow that philosophy is the best thing.

From this it follows that life is a good and death is an evil. What would this mean? Who acted on this premise, that life is good and death is an evil? Most clearly, the condemners. They could not be persuaded that death is a good. Socrates doesn't even try to persuade them. There is then in

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<sup>xiii</sup> Plato, *Statesman* 271c-272d.

this point an agreement between Socrates and the condemners as distinguished from the acquitters. Socrates was ashamed to admit that death is an evil. That death is not the greatest evil he was sure, but that it was an evil, he was ashamed to admit. He presents himself as ignorant as to whether death is good<sup>47</sup> [or] evil. He presents therefore his wisdom as mere knowledge of ignorance. And therefore he conceals the true character of philosophy. Now let us read the conclusion.

**Reader:**

And you too, judges, must face death hopefully, and believe this one truth, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. His affairs are not neglected by the gods; and what has happened to me today has not happened by chance. I am persuaded that it was better for me to die now, and to be released from trouble; and—<sup>48</sup>

**LS:** You see,<sup>49</sup> now that's an important point. That's a different thesis. Death may be a good, but that doesn't mean it is a good for all men, for every man, however circumstanced. Death is an evil, but *now* for Socrates it is good, because he is an old man. Death is not simply good, but good for Socrates. That is, these two different theses, death simply good and death good for Socrates, constantly play into one another and create one of the great difficulties of his speech. Now go on.

**Reader:**

that was the reason why the guide never turned me back. And so I am not at all angry with my accusers or with those who have condemned me to die. Yet it was not<sup>50</sup> with this in mind that they accused me and condemned me, but meaning to do me an injury. So far I may blame them.

**LS:** In other words, if they wanted to really know how to help Socrates to get over that hump, then it would have been good—I mean the hump of the fear of death. But they did it in order to harm him. Yes.

**Reader:**

Yet I have one request to make of them.

**LS:** Read clearly. Let us reread that sentence.

**Reader:**

When my sons—

**LS:** No, before. What you read before.

**Reader:**

Yet I have one request to make of them.

**LS:** Of whom?

**Mr. Metzel:** The accusers.

**LS:** Yes, all right. Or condemners. Yes, keep this in mind. Yes?

**Reader:**

When my sons grow up, punish them, my friends and—

**LS:** Not “friends.” He would not [say that]. “Men,” ya? “Men,” “gentlemen.” Ya?

**Reader:**

and harass them in the same way I have harassed you, if they seem to you to care for riches or any other thing more than excellence; and if they think that they are something when they are really nothing, reproach them, as I have reproached you, for not caring for what they should, and for thinking that they are something when really they are nothing. If<sup>xiv</sup> you will do this, I myself and my sons will have received justice from you.

But now the time has come, and we must go away—I to die, and you to live. Which is better is known to the god alone. (41c-42a)

**LS:** Ya,<sup>51</sup> but it ends in Greek, “is immanifest to everyone except to the god.” “The god” is the last word; the only Platonic dialogue which ends with the word “god.” And there is only one Platonic dialogue which begins with the word “god.” Do you happen to know what that is?

**Student:** The *Laws*.

**LS:** *Laws*. There is a connection. But that would lead us too far. But<sup>52</sup> what does he say in this final remark? You see, the final speech is tripartite: first to the condemners; the center to the acquitters—and this acquitter section has the proof that death is good; and then again to the condemners. What does he say to the condemners in the end?

**Student:** That if they treat his sons in a certain way, then they will have done justice to both him and to his sons.

**LS:** Ya, but first. What does it mean? Ya, step-by-step, the first.

**Same Student:** Well,<sup>53</sup> he tells his condemners to treat his sons the way he has treated them.

**LS:** Ya. Good. Can you restate it in a bit more forceful way without affecting the substance?

**Same Student:** This first part of the statement?

**LS:** Ya.

**Same Student:** To make his sons care about virtue.

**LS:** Ya, but who has been doing that before?

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<sup>xiv</sup> Church has “And if.”

**Same Student:** Socrates.

**LS:** And the condemners? Well,<sup>54</sup> all right, let us take that up later. So he's asked his *condemners* to take up his mission.<sup>55</sup> But what part of the mission, or what aspect of that mission? Less the examining than the admonishing to virtue, ya? But what was the admonishing to virtue as presented by Socrates explicitly<sup>56</sup> when: Did you take care of your soul today? You remember that passage, ya? What was the crucial point there? Mr. Johnson, you were the one who saw it at that time.

**Mr. Johnson:** Well, in the sense that they didn't—

**LS:** What was the argument by which he really—

**Mr. Johnson:** That virtue is simply utilitarian, to—

**LS:** Instrumental. Instrumental virtue. If you want to be wealthy and honored, then you have to practice virtue—vulgar virtue, in the Platonic language.<sup>57</sup> In other words, he says his condemners should encourage the practicing of vulgar virtue. But that, I would say, is not such an outrageous demand, because in a way they had been doing it all the time. Ya?<sup>58</sup> But he asked not his acquitters but his condemners to take up his mission. Now if they do this, he says—for example, if they instruct Socrates's sons in that vulgar virtue—they will have done justice to them and to Socrates. How will they have done justice to Socrates's sons?

**Student:** The sons are not capable of a higher sort of virtue?

**LS:** No, but are the sons not now orphans? And it is the affair of the city to take care of orphans, ya? By instructing them in vulgar virtue, they take the place of the father of whom they have been deprived by an unfortunate accident. But in what sense too would they have done justice to Socrates?

**Student:** <sup>59</sup>I mean, they would show they had learned something from—

**LS:** That they knew. I mean, that is really common. All citizens, with few exceptions—it depends a bit on the circumstances; in statistics of Chicago the percentage is low, but generally speaking the majority of citizens encourage their children to be decent. That's nothing far-fetched.

**Same Student:** Well, the terms of his<sup>60</sup> are “to scorn riches,” and so forth.

**LS:** Let me see.<sup>61</sup> Oh, he is careful. He says: If they seem to you to care for money and something else *before* they take care of virtue. They should not discourage taking care of money, only virtue first. As any normal father would say, if the son cares for money without considering the penalties attached to embezzlement and other things, that he doesn't want—the same position as stated in this. How would they have done justice to Socrates, these fellows? It's difficult to say. But let us leave it open then.

I would like now to discuss very briefly the *Apology* as a whole before we come to the *Crito*. Socrates is accused of impiety. That is the crime. But he believes in the gods, especially in Apollo. And if he believes in Apollo, he believes of course in Artemis and Zeus and Hera. That's clear. Through obeying the god's command, he comes to see that all men are ignorant regarding the greatest things, that human wisdom is just knowledge of ignorance. But what does this mean? If men are ignorant regarding the greatest things, what do they not know, for instance?

**Student:** Whether death is good or bad.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Student:** Whether death is—

**LS:** <sup>62</sup>Ya, sure. We come to that. But something else, which Socrates never says but which is clearly implied.

**Same Student:** Could it be astronomy?

**LS:** Connected with that, but more simply. <sup>63</sup> If men are ignorant regarding the greatest things—

**Same Student:** Gods.

**LS:** Sure. They don't know whether the gods are or are not. <sup>64</sup> Now there was a man who wrote a book beginning with that proposition: "Whether the gods are or are not, I do not know; the aloofness of the subject and the brevity of human life prevents me from knowing it."<sup>xv</sup> Do you know who that was?

**Student:** Anaxagoras.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Was that Anaxagoras?

**LS:** No. Protagoras, whose book was burned for this reason in Athens. You'll find the discussion of that in *Theaetetus*.<sup>xvi</sup> So in other words, <sup>65</sup> that is very paradoxical, that this terrible assertion of Protagoras is not contradicted by Socrates. Ya? He doesn't say it. What he says is only—indeed, as you, Mr. Kendrick, mentioned—Socrates does not know whether or not death is an evil. That is, so to speak, the reflection of this more basic question of the gods. The pro[s] and cons regarding the gods are not discussed, but the pro[s] and cons regarding death are discussed.

Now what is the situation? Who says that death is an evil, and who says that death is not an evil? I mean, ultimately. <sup>66</sup> You know, Socrates himself says throughout the dialogue he doesn't know.

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<sup>xv</sup> For the source, cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 9.51.

<sup>xvi</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 162d-e, although the discussion in this dialogue surrounds another famous doctrine of Protagoras, namely, that "Man is the measure of all things."



Only in the speech addressed to the acquitters does he say in effect he knows; but in the dialogue as a whole, he doesn't. I would say this: the Delphic Apollo suggests that death is no evil. For one must serve the god despite of arousing hatred, i.e., despite of bringing about one's own death violently. The Delphic god demands of Socrates that he should examine his fellow citizens,<sup>67</sup> regardless of whether that leads to death or not. Socrates's *daimonion* suggests that death is an evil, as I have shown when we discussed that. He says, in so many words, one ought to be cautious. It keeps him back from the dangerous life of politics. There is a connection between the *daimonion* and self-preservation, and self-preservation by itself leads to vulgar virtue—the argument of Hobbes, if you want to have a geometric argument regarding self-preservation.<sup>68</sup> No, really, because Hobbes's beautiful argument: If death is the greatest evil, then you must prefer peace at all costs, because in war the danger of violent death is really there. The life of a soldier—how did this Colonel Blimp say?—the life of a soldier is hard and not without real dangers. [Laughter] And so then you must choose peace; but if you want to have peace, you have to behave peaceably, and the habits of peaceful behavior are the virtues. That's a very good argument, and [one] which didn't require the genius of Hobbes to discover, only Hobbes made of it the whole [of] morality. That was his genius.

Now the Delphic Apollo's thesis is proven by the alternative in this speech to the acquitters. Either death is one long night without dream, or else death means to examine people in Hades. This, however, is based on what people say: there is no certainty. Socrates knows that death is not an evil.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Student:** —to apply here—

**LS:** Only that would be—ya, Socrates or Plato<sup>69</sup> would put it somewhat differently. But all right. All right.

**Student:** Well, I don't understand this gift. That is, is it unique to a few individuals, or is it a natural capacity for all men?

**LS:** Ya,<sup>70</sup> that depends. I mean, if you mean philosophizing, ya?

**Same Student:** That would be part of it, yes. Or that would be—

**LS:** Yes, the highest, the most important part. Now you have read, I know, a dialogue in which Plato discusses this problem at much greater length and on a much higher level. I mean the *Republic*. How does the discussion of philosophy in the *Republic* begin? I mean, after it has been introduced as a subject, ya, in the fifth book. The first subject, when he speaks about philosophy?

**Student:** The education of philosophers.

**LS:** No, before, before.<sup>71</sup> Before he speaks of the education.

**Mr. Metzel:** The cave?

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<sup>xvii</sup> The tape was changed at this point.

**LS:** No, no, no, that's later. In the fifth book.

**Student:** The difference between philosophers and nonphilosophers.

**LS:** That is too vague. The *nature*. The nature. No,<sup>72</sup> the subject of the end of the fifth book, which is the beginning of the discussion of philosophy, is the nature of philosophers. And only after he has discussed the nature of the philosophers does he discuss the education of philosophers, just as he did regarding the guardians in the second book. What is the nature of a guardian? You know,<sup>73</sup> like dogs, yes? The mixture of kindness to acquaintances and harshness to enemies: that's the nature of a guardian.<sup>xviii</sup> And then the question arises: How is he to be educated? So the nature of philosophers. What is<sup>74</sup> the crude result of the discussion regarding the human race as a whole, of the discussion of the nature of philosophy? They are very rare. Ya? Very rare.<sup>xix</sup>

So on the other hand it is also clear, I think, from common sense that moronic people are also extremely rare. Most people are able to walk around and to prevent their being run over by cars and other dangers of this nature, and somehow come safely through life—if they are not killed by diseases and so on, of course. In other words,<sup>75</sup> a kind of medium range, which is supramoronic but also subphilosophic, is a fate of the large majority of men. And there are of course considerable differences there, you know. Someone can have an extremely good practical wisdom,<sup>76</sup> shrewdness and breadth and so, and still not be a<sup>77</sup> philosophic mind. That is a Platonic scheme.

Now therefore, if the highest form of freedom is philosophy,<sup>78</sup> that highest freedom would be the preserve of the few. But another kind of freedom, capacity to take care of their own affairs, capacity to take care of the affairs of the *polis* in a not extremely demanding sense, would not be too infrequent.

**Student:** Well, any man could conclude on the basis of reflection of what freedom means for him that life as such is good. I mean, it doesn't have to be Socrates's reflection on freedom to conclude that the philosophic life is best, but the political man or the businessman, or whoever else reflect on—

**LS:** Ya, sure, not Socrates. Sure. In this—in the *Apology* that is, I think<sup>79</sup> the basic question is<sup>80</sup> whether life as such is good or an evil.<sup>81</sup> That's the basic question. And it is of course linked up in Socrates's case with the assertion that the philosophic life is the best life. Ya? Life as such being a good, the philosophic life is the best life. And what was your question? How does he prove that?

**Same Student:** No, my question was the nature of this so-called gift. But<sup>82</sup> I see it; it's a gift only in an extended sense, that is, when applied to Socrates.

**LS:** No. Excuse me, let us go back to the basics. Life is a good. That is a gift, and therefore the love of life is a gift, in the original sense of the word, which every man has.

<sup>xviii</sup> See session 8, note xx.

<sup>xix</sup> *Republic* 474c-480a (the nature of philosophers); 476b-c (their scarcity).

**Same Student:** So in what way is it a gift, if all men have it?

**LS:** Then let me use a somewhat more cautious expression: a natural inclination, the love of life, self-preservation.<sup>83</sup> That, I think, cannot be denied, that this is so; and we see, therefore, [that] whenever a man commits suicide, the question arises: Why did he commit suicide? You never raise the question: Why did Mr. Cohen not commit suicide? Ya? Because you're around. You take it for granted that not committing suicide<sup>84</sup> doesn't involve a question. Committing suicide involves a question. The normal and natural thing is not committing suicide. And the ordinary explanation is that he had particular misery—I don't mean you now—[laughter] a particular misery which induced him to do this unnatural thing, to take his own life. Ya? Or he may also have been demented or so on. Now the question, the fundamental question would be this: All arguments of this nature which are underlying the traditional natural law doctrine presuppose that nature is good. I mentioned this before, ya? It means that the natural inclinations are, as natural inclinations, good. And quite a few people have said, at least in the beginning of modern times, that's a dogmatic premise. I believe I mentioned this problem last time or so. That raises a question, surely, and the question is: How does Plato or Socrates meet that? That one can speak of meeting it, I believe, is proved by the fact that the *alternative*, namely, that life and therefore also the inclination to life is evil, is brought up here. So he knew it was an issue. Whether he met it adequately or not would require a fuller study (a) of Plato than we can afford now, (b) of the arguments of those of the other side. You know? I mean, say, the implicit argument of men like Descartes and Hobbes and others. And . . . and so. One would have to go into that.<sup>85</sup> Simply stated, I think then the case of Plato is that it leads to a simple self-contradiction to deny the goodness of nature.

**Same Student:** You also put a great store in this natural inclination of Socrates as—

**LS:** Yes, Socrates was a special case. Now let me elaborate this. The natural inclinations are of course not alone effective in man.<sup>86</sup> They are always affected by opinions, which cannot be so in the case of the brutes; brutes are incapable to opine. But in the case of man, we are always influenced by opinions. And there are certain opinions which are opinions against nature, that's the implication: destructive of nature.<sup>87</sup> Socrates is characterized by Plato as a man in whom the natural inclinations on all levels, not only certain levels,<sup>88</sup> and especially on the higher levels,<sup>89</sup> were unbelievably healthy, powerful, so that the false opinions could not affect him. One way of stating it is that Socrates, even if he had no knowledge, always had right opinion. That's only a reflection of his *physis*, which was so well ordered.

**Same Student:** But not only well developed and healthy, but correct.

**LS:** Ya, ya, sure. That is the meaning of that. So that the opinions to which he adhered, as it were, even prior to reflection, only divining, not knowing, were the good, true,<sup>90</sup> correct opinions.

**Same Student:** Yes, but I'm puzzled about the falling back on natural inclinations as the source for (1) Socrates's knowledge or wisdom, and (2) the in-general source for the peoples' desires.

**LS:** Ya, but all right, let us try alternatives.<sup>91</sup> I mean, the predominant view today of course is absolutely what you say. And not only the positivists, but very great thinkers; for example, Kant. Kant said it is impossible to build moral teaching on a reflection on human nature, and he used all kinds of arguments. One involved, for example, this: that if, say, the doctrine of justice is based on the consideration of human nature, the concept of justice thus emerging is inapplicable to God. So you cannot speak in any strict sense of God's justice, and that has grave consequences for human life. So we must understand justice—all morality in such a way that its meaning is in no way dependent on the nature of man but must be related to the nature of any rational or intellectual being, man or higher than man.<sup>92</sup> Ya, a complete divorce of ethics from the understanding of man's nature. That was probably the most radical point.

Ya, but what was the consequence? The consequence was Kant's formal ethics. The problem of the matter, the content, was—Kant believed<sup>93</sup> his form, as he understood it, would generate this matter. But I think one can show that this doesn't work, and therefore the content has to be gotten from somewhere. A merely formal ethics, that is exactly in practice—although Kant did not mean it—the position which I sketched on another occasion: the people who say the men to be respected are those who adhere to an ideal, whatever that ideal may be. Ya? I mean, in other words, people who would say consideration with one's comfort and belly, and self-preservation, and so that is of course not morality; that we share with the brutes. Man's dignity depends on his being dedicated to an ideal. Which ideal? Any ideal. That is not what Kant intended, but <sup>94</sup>that is the strictly formal ethics. You have a description only of the how—dedication or however you call it—but not of the what. And the How does not generate a What. And<sup>95</sup> one can try, but that, I think, leads also to absurdities—although it is practically, as a rule of thumb, within certain limits possible. But only within certain limits. Think of those people who say, as has been frequently said, “Think of the really best type of communist: you cannot deny that they have an integrity.” That's the word which is used, meaning the dedication which the ordinary man does not possess. His integrity is something, ya? It is the only thing which ultimately counts. That is much too abstract. You have to go into content of the ideals, you know?

**Same Student:** Where do you make a distinction between the goodness of the natural inclinations per se, and the need for the natural inclinations to be molded and directed?

**LS:** Ya, but as natural inclinations—

**Same Student:** Not the natural inclinations themselves.

**LS:** As natural inclinations, they point toward something, they are directed toward something, and that gives you the end in the most general sense. I mean,<sup>96</sup> now show me the concrete difficulty.

**Same Student:** Well, Socrates's whole endeavor is to change the course of men in political life. They went into political life because presumably their natural inclinations, combined with their opinions, said this was the best life for them. So since you don't change natural inclinations . . .

**LS:** No, but<sup>97</sup> I don't know whether I understood you. I mean, all men have the natural inclination to live, except if perverted by certain false opinions. Ya? For example, the Indian

widow, a young woman of twenty-two, who has herself burned. Socrates, I think, would say—and not only Socrates—that is based on a wrong opinion, that she commits suicide for that reason. Ya? Good. Now so all men, when not perverted by wrong opinion, desire to live. And out of this there grows such things as an art of medicine, the art of the shoemaker and so on, and above all the political art, because man is not only mortal but also killable. Ya? And therefore he needs the *polis* for protection both against criminals within society as well as against enemies without. Ya? So thus the political art is developed on this level for sake of self-preservation. Good. Let . . .

**Same Student:** Maybe I can state it more succinctly. If Socrates's inclinations lead him to have opinions which differ radically from the opinions of most men, these opinions cannot themselves be defended on the basis of his natural inclinations. That is, at many places in the course of the dialogue you seem to say: How does Socrates know this? He knows this because his *eros* or—

**LS:** Ya, sure. No, that is not sufficient knowledge.<sup>98</sup> You can say that is an inference from the fact that it is a natural inclination. He is directed—not only he, everyone is directed by his natural inclinations, but knowledge consists in realizing that it's a natural inclination.

**Same Student:** Yes, but how can this particular natural inclination of Socrates be defended against all—

**LS:** Ya, but what is the objection? Which is the objection? The fact that the striving, the desire for self-preservation in itself is a natural inclination? What is the objection?

**Same Student:** There's no objection to that.

**LS:**<sup>99</sup> I thought you meant this difficulty, that the desire for self-preservation, to take the most interesting case here, leads to the *polis*, and therefore it requires that men are citizens, do their duties as citizens, and some even more than that, lead an active political life. Socrates does not do that. Ya,<sup>100</sup> that is a difficulty. As a practical proposition, how would you say that? I mean, if everyone would do what Socrates did, no *polis* could exist.<sup>101</sup> Self-preservation would become impossible, irrational.

**Same Student:** No. Although that may be a true practical consequence, can this position of Socrates be defended by argument apart from any reference to his peculiar inclination for philosophy?

**LS:** Surely. I mean, it must be defended. Otherwise that would be a mere idiosyncrasy which is not worthy of any respect—

**Same Student:** Yes, but at all crucial points, it seems, you just referred to his—

**LS:** No, no. I mean, let us take this seriously. How could Socrates—in a developed argument, which he doesn't give here—defend himself against the proposition he neglects his duty? He admits that the *polis* is necessary, and that means that people must be not only law-abiding, but at least those sufficiently gifted must take an active share in political life. A perfectly good

argument. How does Socrates defend it? That is the real accusation. What would he say? If someone says, “You, by your action, contribute to the destruction of the *polis*,” what would he say?

**Same Student:** That he parts . . . his not knowing, so therefore—

**LS:** Ya, ya, all right, but let us forget now this point, because we must be able to discern this really serious argument behind that, and then we can also try to link it up with the argument as explicitly given. Did Socrates’s nonparticipation in political life destroy the city of Athens, as a matter of fact?

**Same Student:** No.

**LS:** No. It was before and went on. So let us draw an inference: there are plenty of people who are eager to be politically active, number one. There is no . . . of that. Now the question is, of course, those eager fellows may not be the best ones, and therefore the argument of the *Republic*, you know, why good men should go into politics: not because they like it, but lest the bad men will take over. But then the question becomes really a practical question, as it is in itself.<sup>102</sup> How could Socrates do more good: by not going into politics or by going into politics? And then his serious judgment was: he did more good by not going into politics. Not only because it preserved his life, because that argument is of course fallacious; one can make an equally good argument on the grounds of self-preservation for going into politics, for having powerful connections which will get you out of any fix into which you might come. You remember the argument of Callicles to which is alluded in . . . So that is the sensible problem and a necessary question, we can say, because that is the effect of the argument of Aristophanes against Socrates, that<sup>103</sup> people like you in fact destroy what is the basis of your own activity, namely, the *polis*. Ya? And Socrates—and I think this argument goes through the Platonic work—denies that: That’s not true. The private life,<sup>104</sup> if you can call that a private life as led by Socrates or Plato, is so far from being destructive of the *polis* [that it] is even contributing, if indirectly, to the *polis*. The *polis* needs philosophy—such is the position of Socrates, I think—but it doesn’t need the rule of philosophers. I mean, officially of course that’s the argument of the *Republic*, that the *polis* needs the rule of [philosophers], but that’s practically impossible, as made very clear in the *Republic*. A good society, if we use modern terms, requires that there be men dedicated to the life of the mind, but as such they are not the rulers, and because there is a certain disproportion between what they are doing and what a political life requires. The tenth book<sup>105</sup> of the *Ethics* of Aristotle is a beautiful description of that problem.<sup>106</sup>

Plato is very far from having a simplistic view of the harmony of the natural inclinations. There are tensions between them. Ya? Tensions. For example, take the very simple thing, without going into philosophy: the social life of man requires a *polis* [and] requires therefore the willingness to die for the country, for the city, in clear contradiction to self-preservation. That cannot be helped. There is no simple harmony. One can<sup>107</sup> state it in very general terms: there is a harmony. Self-preservation is the basic and lowest; social life and the qualities demanded by that have a higher rank than mere self-preservation. Empirically, easily provable: we do not admire a man for the mere fact that he preserves himself. Ya? I mean, the classic case of the mere self-preservation is course the valetudinarian. We can say he’s a shrewd fellow, he takes

care of himself, but that's not admiration. But<sup>108</sup> a public-spirited man, a thoughtful man who exposes himself to dangers not only in war but to other perhaps more difficult dangers for the sake of the good society, is an admirable man. That is higher. And<sup>109</sup> on the other hand, according to the Platonic scheme the life of the mind is still higher. And there are also tensions between the social life and the life of the mind which correspond in a different way to the tensions between society and self-preservation of which I spoke before. Mr. Faulkner?

**Mr. Faulkner:** Where is the contribution of philosophy to the *polis* made clear in the *Apology*? I thought that, as far as I remember from the previous discussion, it was merely established that Socrates did not harm the *polis*, but except for the argument concerning the gadfly, which is discredited, there is no statement that he's contributed to it.

**LS:** Ya, ya, that is very good, too, what you say. But . . . to answer the questions? The purpose of the *Apology* is not to prove that the *polis* needs philosophy but a decent defense of the philosopher who is no longer concerned with living,<sup>110</sup> a defense so phrased that it would not make philosophy utterly unpopular in Athens. That is much more limited. And to say nothing of the fact that if Socrates had to talk to the political cream of Athens, he would talk differently than in such a speech addressed to three hundred men more or less arbitrarily at random chosen. Mr. Gildin?

**Mr. Gildin:** There was one thing that puzzled me. In an early part of the dialogue he seemed to maintain that—the paradox that no man harmed another willingly. Here at the very end he seems to say the opposite, that they do not harm him but they intend to harm him. And I wondered . . . there.

**LS:** Yes, that is a long question, and I'm sure I have not solved this difficulty, but still I can suggest only one step for clarification. Strictly speaking, Socrates doesn't say that no one voluntarily commits<sup>111</sup> [injustice] or no one voluntarily harms another. I come back to that later. Strictly speaking, Socrates—no one voluntarily chooses the bad. Ya? Every choice—I mean, no one chooses evil as evil, meaning for himself. That is true. But I know what you mean; this passage where he said<sup>112</sup> the link of the two theses between—what was that passage which I meant? There is a contradiction which I meant—

**Mr. Gildin:** Well, I'm thinking of when he refutes Meletus, strictly, with this very paradoxical argument. You know: How can I be harming anyone else? And at the very end he says—

**LS:** <sup>113</sup>Yes, but what was the more specific thesis—I don't remember at the moment—against Meletus? What did he say<sup>114</sup> more precisely than you stated it now? You stated it more clearly before.

**Mr. Gildin:** No one wishes to live with bad neighbors.

**LS:** Oh, yes. Yes, that's it.<sup>115</sup> Ya, that is true, of course. Why is this an overstatement? I mean, everyone wants the good for himself. That's true. But only the question is: Which good? And some people, believe it or not, think that certain very low goods are the highest good. Take a miser. Ya? He doesn't want to harm himself by, say, not eating and by living very badly in every

respect. He thinks he is acquiring for himself the highest good, the highest good being cash in a box. Ya? Good. So now this fellow, of course—now how would Socrates argue against him?<sup>116</sup> That's the highest good for you. Therefore you are very anxious that there are no robbers, no housebreakers, and so on. Ya? And therefore he will go around and tell everyone how wicked it is to enter houses. But he would<sup>117</sup> of course also have to say, or at least act on the maxim that contribution to charity is wicked, because it would contradict this. Ya? Now in other words, what is the mistake of Socrates in the argument? Well, it is much too general. I mean, it doesn't go into the fact that the good which people desire and<sup>118</sup> with the preservation of which they are concerned, there is an enormous variety there. And the famous fact that there are quite a few people who corrupt their fellow men—I mean, you get reports of it every day. For example, Mr. Morrison's activity with the policemen is a good example, if you don't believe me.<sup>xx</sup> Now<sup>119</sup> he corrupted his fellow men. Why? He made life more miserable for himself. That was not the motive, ya? He thought he made life more comfortable, because if the policemen cover up for his robberies or whatever he did, he would not be punished. Ya? Now what was wrong in the calculation? I mean—

**Mr. Gildin:** Somebody slipped up. [Laughter]

**LS:** No, that's important for Plato on the lowest level. The danger of slip-up is so considerable that a prudent man wouldn't do what they did. Yes, sure:<sup>120</sup> honesty as policy, that<sup>121</sup> is surely good, as far as it goes. Ya?

Now I think I will only say a few words regarding the *Crito*, which we will discuss next time. (And first, read the paper.) Now the *Apology* and the *Crito* are,<sup>122</sup> very superficially, very different in spirit. I remember having read in Paul Shorey—you know, he was a professor of classics at this university about forty years ago<sup>123</sup>, in his book *What Plato Says: What Plato Says*, yes, not "*What He Thought*"—and I think it was really not quite adequate<sup>124</sup> regarding what he said, but it is a useful summary, by the way, of the dialogues and it has one quality, one helpful quality: that he gives you parallels. You know, when you read a passage, say, in the *Crito*, in his report he gives you parallels in other dialogues, and that can be helpful. Now in it he makes this remark. He loves the *Crito* and detests the *Apology* because the *Crito* is a conservative book, law-abiding, and the *Apology* is the book of a rebel, a revolutionary.<sup>xxi</sup> You know, when Socrates says, "Regardless of what you do, I will philosophize, even if the law forbids it," he challenges the whole *polis* and its laws. And here he accepts the laws *en bloc* and says: You must not disobey them under any circumstances. As a provisional statement of the difficulty it is interesting, and it shows also how this so-fashionable distinction between the conservatives and the liberals today<sup>125</sup> [doesn't] work out when you go to interesting cases. Ya? You know? I mean,<sup>126</sup> you must have read some of this discussion upon what conservatives and liberals are and where each of them gets into [these issues]. That would not be, by the way, a bad subject for [a] doctor's<sup>xxii</sup> thesis, to take up these two positions as presented and see that it is a way of blind men fighting against each other. Although,<sup>127</sup> I mean, I don't say that the distinction<sup>128</sup> is meaningless politically, very far from that, but it is only relevant in a very crude political sense.

<sup>xx</sup> Strauss most likely refers to a police scandal in Chicago that broke in January of 1960. Eight police officers were arrested for operating a burglary ring with the aid of career thief Richard Morrison.

<sup>xxi</sup> Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 83.

<sup>xxii</sup> I.e., doctoral.



You know, those who wish to abolish progressive income tax, and those who wish to increase it, that is a clear practical issue. And there are others of the same kind, and also loyalty oaths and this kind of thing, which are divisive issues. But if you trace it beyond the politics of this very moment to principles, it is really impossible to find any [difference in] principle.

Now in the *Apology* Socrates, we may say, appeals from the law of Athens to something like a higher law, although the term never occurs. But there is an equivalent of that, because you can say what it says about the oracle of Apollo, that has a function of a higher law. In the *Crito*<sup>129</sup> he rejects implicitly any such appeal. You have to abide by the law. That seems to be a clear contradiction, but is it really, is it necessarily a contradiction? Can these two positions not be reconciled, at least in the way in which Socrates understands it: an appeal to a higher law in the one dialogue, and the refusal to make such an appeal in the other? Because then we would have to establish the precise meaning of the appeal on the one hand and of the refusal to appeal on the other. Yes?

**Student:** Well, I think that he assumes in the *Crito* that the laws would have to be good laws, then make the distinction between—

**LS:** Oh, no. Then it would be easy. That is the best excuse for any revolutionary action. No, no. That he does not do.

**Same Student:** Well, he says that Sparta and Crete, for example, have good laws, and [he] singles out these cities, and the implication is that some—

**LS:** That is a very good point, but that is already on a<sup>130</sup> much deeper level than I now take it. You are already indicating the difficulties of the argument of the *Crito*. I'm speaking now really of the obvious surface, accessible without any reflection.<sup>131</sup> What does the appeal to a higher law mean in the *Apology*? Let us get this straight. What is that higher law? A very specific law: the law imposed on an individual called Socrates, and perhaps on people akin to him: the claim of Socrates and people akin to him to philosophize. Nothing else. There is no appeal to a higher law against loyalty oaths or something like this: philosophy and philosophy alone.<sup>132</sup> And the inevitable trouble in the argument is that it is not very clear what philosophy means. Ya? I mean, walking around and examining, that seems to be the meaning. What does he do in the *Crito*? I mean, the most obvious thing: he refuses to run away from jail—I mean, to commit a flagrantly illegal action. I think one could suggest this formula: man has no right to transgress a law, even if it hurts unjustly his body. And the greatest hurt which could be done to the body would of course be capital punishment. But there is the right to transgress a law which hurts the soul. But what was done to Socrates, the capital punishment, did not hurt his soul. Therefore, no right to transgress. But a law which would forbid him to philosophize would hurt the soul, and therefore he could not obey it. That would be a possible, an easy way of reconciling the distinction. The problem has a certain similarity with the problem of passive and active disobedience as it was developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Do you know what that was?

**Student:** One has to obey an action, but not necessarily in good conscience? Active being—

**LS:** No, no. Passive disobedience would mean you never rebel—under no circumstances, even if the government is heretical and . . . Never. But active obedience would mean to positively do what the government commands. Take a simple case, as it was the situation there: Protestant countries or Catholic countries. A Protestant government commanding Catholics to deny certain principles of Catholicism by deed or speech, that would be active obedience. Ya? And the Catholics in this case said no. Passive obedience merely meant not to rebel. Not to rebel. Was it clear, what I said? Okay, take another example. Ya, the crucial point was that under no circumstances has a citizen or subject the right to rebel. But he does have the right to disobey commandments of the government which are incompatible with his conscience. That was<sup>133</sup> the most moderate position. The alternative was of course that under certain conditions you may rebel. Socrates's position has something to do with that, but I believe the formula which I suggested comes closer to what he says.

But if I say man has a right to transgress the laws which hurt the soul, he means that in a very precise sense. Only a law which forbids philosophizing can hurt the soul. A law which would, for example, forbid him openly to question the existence of Zeus, he would not think that would hurt his soul, because that would clearly in his opinion belong to the competence of government to do that. Yes?

**Student:** Why doesn't a law, I mean, which kill . . . presumably slide under this distinction between laws against the soul and the law, you know, against killing the body, laws against the body, presumably . . . death . . .

**LS:** So in other words—I see. Your difficulty is this: there might be cases, and this is exactly a case, which hurt both the body and the soul. Ya, but Socrates denies that. On what ground does he deny that there is a contradiction of the two-pronged law here, of the two prongs of that law? Socrates says his soul is not hurt by accepting punishment, capital punishment. Why is his soul not hurt? I mean, you say in certain cases, and especially in our case, the two provisions of that law as I described it contradict each other. His body is hurt, obviously, but we know hurt of the body is no reason. But you say also his soul is hurt. But the whole argument of the *Apology* was that his soul is not hurt. Did Socrates become a meaner man by accepting the punishment? That would mean hurting the soul.

**Same Student:** No.

**LS:** Ya, but still, you've got a point. The fact that Socrates mentions so frequently in both works the fact that he is seventy plays a role. That is a relevant circumstance. Take a young man of twenty-five instead of a man of seventy.

**Same Student:** . . . I guess I don't know . . .

**LS:** Yes. That is I think the problem, really. That is the great problem of the *Crito*: Is, as it seems to be at first glance, the statement that “under all circumstances you must not disobey a law which hurts the body” universally valid for every man regardless of circumstances? Or is it only valid under certain circumstances, for example, age? Socrates's useful life was practically at an end. That was his opinion. And therefore that is a special case. Yes?

**Student:** The question is: How valid is the age argument? He makes this argument to Crito, who is presumably<sup>134</sup> almost as old as he is;<sup>135</sup> and Crito brushes it off and says: But other people, their age doesn't keep them from resenting it when they find themselves in your position.<sup>xxiii</sup>

**LS:** Yes, surely. I know that.

**Same Student:** So it's this specific circumstance of the philosopher—

**LS:** No, not only that, but also whether these other men are not rather foolish—we will take that up next time<sup>136</sup>—you know, by clinging to life, and would wish to live even a hundred fifty years if they could, even if they were completely decrepit and a burden on anyone and everyone.

**Same Student:** It's not a question of clinging, you see. Crito doesn't make it a clinging, so it's not an act of—

**LS:** Ya,<sup>137</sup> I mean, what I say now is only this: there is not obviously a contradiction between the two things, ya, between the two dialogues. And that we must keep in mind. We must also keep in mind another problem. The thesis of the *Apology* was that Socrates knows nothing and that his wisdom consists in his knowing that he knows nothing. We must keep in mind the problem of Socrates's knowledge, or his ignorance regarding the greatest things.<sup>138</sup> Is the argument of the *Crito* based on *knowledge*? You know, is this thesis, “under no circumstances must you transgress the law,” or more specifically in this form, that “legally condemned, you [must not] make a jail break,”<sup>139</sup> a universally valid law? Socrates says so. But does he know it? Or is it merely an opinion? That's the question. We must investigate that.

Yes, as for this passage to which Mr. Berger referred, that is—where is that? Near the beginning. Ya, 43c, where he says: But others of your age are caught in such disasters, but their old age does not in any way induce them not to worry, or not to be angry at the present calamity. And Socrates says: That is so.<sup>xxiv</sup> Sure.

**Same Student:** And it . . . the point.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** It leads to the point, goes on to say—

**LS:** Yes, sure. Yes, but<sup>140</sup> Socrates is not perturbed at all by approaching death because he is old, he says. Ya? And the argument of Crito induces him to add: This is not a sufficient reason, because there are other old men who, when death approaches, are perturbed. Socrates is—apart from being old, he has another quality which we can call [sensible]. He is a sensible man. He's old and sensible. He acts his age. He acts in accordance with his age. He acts in accordance with nature. Therefore he is not perturbed. He knows that he has to die, and that he will be not for

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Crito*, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1969), 80 (43c).

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Crito* 43c.

very long the same Socrates that he was before, and that he doesn't see any benefit in being a decayed Socrates. That is a point which he doesn't develop, but which is not too difficult to guess. Yes?

Well, I think the other points—it's of no use to continue the discussion of the *Crito*. Is there any point you would like to bring up now? A few minutes we can still have here. Ya?

**Student:** I have a naïve question.

**LS:** The naïve questions are always the best questions. [Laughter]

**Same Student:** . . . from the point of view of Socrates, the passions were really not . . . and had to be commanded by the reason, but you seemed to develop the theme that the natural inclinations are good—

**LS:** Oh, that's easy. That is not naïve, but if I may use another word, it's ignorant. [Laughter]

**Same Student:** That's what I would have said.

**LS:** . . . Natural inclinations aren't passions. In modern times they began to<sup>141</sup> become identified. But that is in itself, that you strive for life is not a passion, it is a natural inclination. A passion it becomes only when it becomes a kind of obsession. A natural inclination is perfectly compatible with any mere mind—

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted "There are three papers due Friday, that's right. Good. And then there is Mr. Crock, who is not in here. And then there is Rabbi Weiss, who is supposed to...But, if at any rate, that still has some time."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted " , prison—."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "Freedom, wealth, and exile—."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "where—."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "if punishment is impossible—."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "let us forget about social—."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "You that—."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "more—."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "between—."

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "That is—."

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "That—I mean, that is—."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "certain more—."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "whether—."

<sup>14</sup> Deleted "Is it—."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "someone who—."

<sup>16</sup> Deleted "I think—."

<sup>17</sup> Deleted "but is it not—."

<sup>18</sup> Deleted "but what—no,."

<sup>19</sup> Deleted "I mean, in other words, for example"

<sup>20</sup> Deleted " , you can of course say—."

<sup>21</sup> Deleted "Is this freedom not—."

<sup>22</sup> Deleted "but there is a—no,.""

<sup>23</sup> Deleted "the."

<sup>24</sup> Deleted "So the—."

<sup>25</sup> Deleted "the freedom—."

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- 26 Deleted “if you—.”
- 27 Deleted “could you not.”
- 28 Deleted “that—.”
- 29 Deleted “**Same Student:** “And if I tell you—” LS: No, wait.”
- 30 Deleted “that is—.”
- 31 Deleted “Here, here, not—.”
- 32 Deleted “say—.”
- 33 Deleted “and go then—.”
- 34 Deleted “n.”
- 35 Deleted ““in which he made it.”
- 36 Changed from “Yes, that—yes, “If I wanted to do something—if I did not wish”—no, “if I did not—was.”
- 37 Deleted “Now let us—.”
- 38 Deleted “whether there is not—.”
- 39 Deleted “we are told—.”
- 40 Deleted “Although.”
- 41 Deleted “for the unjust—.”
- 42 Deleted “for him—.”
- 43 Deleted “that is not—.”
- 44 Deleted “By—.”
- 45 Deleted “that life is—.”
- 46 Deleted “Why does he not—.”
- 47 Deleted “and.”
- 48 Deleted “that was the reason—.”
- 49 Deleted “what Socrates—.”
- 50 Deleted “in this—.”
- 51 Deleted “The only—.”
- 52 Deleted “is it not—.”
- 53 Deleted “he presents—.”
- 54 Deleted “let us—.”
- 55 Deleted “But this mission—.”
- 56 Deleted “when he made this, you know”
- 57 Deleted “He—.”
- 58 Deleted “I mean, that is—.”
- 59 Deleted “Their—.”
- 60 Deleted “as—.”
- 61 Deleted “No, if they—.”
- 62 Deleted “Yes, but more—.”
- 63 Deleted “He—.”
- 64 Deleted “This of course—.”
- 65 Deleted “what I’m getting at is that Socrates—.”
- 66 Deleted “You can—.”
- 67 Deleted “and.”
- 68 Deleted “No, but—.”
- 69 Changed from “Only that would be—yes, that—Socrates would—or Plato.”
- 70 Deleted “It—.”
- 71 Deleted “, before.”
- 72 Deleted “that is—the conclusion is—.”
- 73 Deleted “—the mixture of—.”
- 74 Deleted “the respect—.”
- 75 Deleted “there—.”
- 76 Deleted “—yes.”
- 77 Deleted “philosophic [inaudible word]—.”
- 78 Deleted “it would be a preserve—.”
- 79 Deleted “—namely,.”
- 80 Deleted “whether death—.”
- 81 Deleted “That’s the—.”

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- 82 Deleted “in—.”
- 84 Deleted “is—.”
- 85 Deleted “Whether it is—.”
- 86 Deleted “There is—.”
- 87 Deleted “When—.”
- 88 Deleted “on all levels,.”
- 89 Deleted “are—.”
- 90 Deleted “the.”
- 91 Deleted “Let us say, all right—.”
- 92 Deleted “the reflection—.”
- 93 Deleted “he could—.”
- 94 Deleted “that is the inevit—.”
- 95 Deleted “that is—you can—.”
- 96 Deleted “what—.”
- 97 Deleted “Socrates—.”
- 98 Deleted “you can say, that is.”
- 99 Deleted “Now where does [inaudible words]—.”
- 100 Deleted “how can he—Ya.”
- 101 Deleted “Is that—.”
- 102 Deleted “what are, in a given case, the chances that—.”
- 103 Deleted “you—.”
- 104 Deleted “as—.”
- 105 Deleted “of the *Politics*—.”
- 106 Deleted “That there is—what Socrates—I mean, Socrates is very far from—.”
- 107 Deleted “state the simple—in very—.”
- 108 Deleted “a man—.”
- 109 Deleted “the—.”
- 110 Deleted “one which—.”
- 111 Deleted “unjustice.”
- 112 Deleted “—the middle—.”
- 113 Deleted “Yes, no—.”
- 114 Deleted “most—.”
- 115 Deleted “Yes, which is—yes, now why is—.”
- 116 Deleted ““You want to—I mean.”
- 117 Changed from “That would be the—ya? But what about—he would.”
- 118 Deleted “with which—.”
- 119 Deleted “what—.”
- 120 Deleted “that is—.”
- 121 Deleted “is good—.”
- 122 Deleted “in a very—.”
- 123 Deleted “he says somewhere—no,.”
- 124 Deleted “for—.”
- 125 Deleted “don’t.”
- 126 Deleted “there is a long—.”
- 127 Deleted “it has a certain—.”
- 128 Deleted “is not—.”
- 129 Deleted “he says implicitly—.”
- 130 Deleted “much more—.”
- 131 Deleted “In the—.”
- 132 Deleted “And what philosophy—the trouble is—.”
- 133 Deleted “the moderate—.”
- 134 Deleted “who.”
- 135 Deleted “about the same—.”
- 136 Deleted “There is—.”
- 137 Deleted “but why—I mean—yes, well we go in—.”
- 138 Deleted “On what—.”

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<sup>139</sup> Deleted “is this.”

<sup>140</sup> Deleted “we—still, is it not possible—.”

<sup>141</sup> Deleted “be—.”

## Session 14<sup>i</sup>

**Leo Strauss:** [In progress] —what Socrates should do is still open. The question is: Is it just to escape from prison? Is it just for *Socrates's* circumstance, as he is, to escape from prison? Obviously two different questions. This question turns around the more fundamental question as to the knowledge of justice. Does Socrates possess such knowledge? Socrates says he follows only the *logos*, and yet he acted in the past and is going to act now. So he must possess knowledge of justice, you would say. But this knowledge is not presented as knowledge in the *Crito*. That knowledge is taken over and presupposed from earlier acts of reasoning, from earlier agreements between Socrates and Crito. But agreement is not the same thing as truth. Two people may agree on something without being satisfied that it is the truth.<sup>1</sup> These earlier agreements, however, are here said to be open for reconsideration. Strictly speaking, they are however not re-examined. They are only reasserted, especially the crucial premise: to live well is identical with living justly.

Now hitherto the case for Socrates's position for staying in prison, i.e., dying, was this: for an old man, life is not worth living. In this argument, the point of view is the good life without any regard to the just life. Simply from the point of view of good living,<sup>2</sup> you don't live as long as you are very old. Against this, Crito had said:<sup>3</sup> It is your *duty* to escape. By dying, you, Socrates, are taking the easy way out. The easy way out, because death might be that dreamless sleep—you remember?—which is such a very pleasant condition, much more pleasant than to raise these children of Socrates, you see, who were not so attractive objects of education as some other people were. It was Crito who said one must do the just thing, and the just thing is not to take the easy way out: in this case, to die. So this point has to be stressed more than I have done last time. It is Crito who brings up the question of justice, but the question of course is this: Is Crito's understanding of justice correct?

What is justice? Is there knowledge of justice? Are there experts in justice, just as there are experts in bodily health? Now if there is an expert in any field, one must follow his opinion as distinguished from the opinions of the many. And the laws are opinions of the many. If there is no expert, one may or may not follow the opinion of the many, i.e., the laws. But a prudent man, a practically wise man, would consider in that case the power of the many: their power to kill. He would not consider it if there is knowledge of justice,<sup>4</sup> if there are experts in justice. By obeying the opinion of the many, i.e., the laws, Socrates will be killed. But there is another opinion of the many which plays a great role here, which is public opinion, to which Crito had referred. By obeying the opinion of the many in the sense of public opinion, Socrates will not be killed, because public opinion approves of one's escaping from prison under these conditions. So Crito is surely right if there is no knowledge of the just. In other words, if there is nothing by nature just, if justice is entirely conventional, entirely opinion, then why should you respect that opinion? Merely because [it is] the opinion of many doesn't make it more respectable.

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<sup>i</sup> In the audiorecording (number 14), the two parts of the session are in reverse order. The first part begins at 1:02:00; the second part starts at the beginning. The transcript of the second part begins in the middle of page 327 below; the location is indicated with a footnote.



Therefore, to contradict Crito, Socrates must prove that there is something by nature just which is not mere opinion. And this is the function of the appearance of the Laws. This personification of the Laws is a substitute for the proof of natural justice. It is of course not a proof, but within it we see the nature of justice.

Now two suggestions were made at the end of what we read last time regarding justice. First, but it is rather a clarification of what injustice means: to act unjustly means to hurt human beings. That was the first suggestion. The second suggestion was: to act unjustly means to break promises, or engagements. That is clear, because<sup>5</sup> the modern doctrine as started by Hobbes is implied in that, in the latter point: nothing is by nature just. I exaggerate a bit. But justice means performance of promises. The only principle of right is that if you have agreed to something, not deceived and not under duress, then you have recognized something which you then have to consider. Now these two principles, these two understandings of justice—injustice means hurting people<sup>6</sup> or injustice means breaking promises—can conflict with one another. That makes it interesting. In certain situations you *hurt* people by keeping your promise, as in the beginning of the *Republic*, you promise to return the gun and<sup>7</sup> the owner has become a madman in between: you hurt him and anyone exposed to him by returning the gun. So in other words, not hurting people is the higher principle. This much I think we should remember before we continue. And now let us continue immediately, because it is my firm intention and/or hope that we finish our reading of the *Crito* today. We begin now at the point where the laws come up, 50a6.

Now look at it, Socrates says, in the following manner: “If we are about to run away from here” [or] “if you are about to run away from here, or however one<sup>8</sup> has to call that action”—I mean, maybe there is a more delicate expression for what we are doing—“the Laws and the community of the *polis* would appear to us and ask.” Do you have that?<sup>ii</sup> But this term “appearing”<sup>9</sup> is used of dreams and visions, as I learned from Burnet. You see here also two different things: the Laws and the *polis* appear. And they would ask—you see, what do they say? “Tell me, O Socrates.” Who is then speaking, the plural or the singular? And what is the singular here in this particular case?

**Student:** The *polis*.

**LS:** *Polis*. So to begin with, it is not the Laws who are speaking, but the *polis*. Now the *polis* consists of course of human beings, the citizen body assembled. The Laws are not human beings. The *polis* cannot be superhuman. The Laws may be, because they are not human beings.<sup>10</sup> Now let us go on from here. Ya? “Tell me, Socrates, what do you intend to do?” Do you have it? Whoever has it, read it. Let us not be formal.

**Reader:**

[Socrates:] “Tell me, Socrates, what have you in mind to do? In trying to do this, can’t you see that you are trying to destroy us, the Laws, and the whole state, as far as you can do it?”

**LS:** “The whole *polis*.” I mean,<sup>11</sup> we don’t have to correct each time. Yes?

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<sup>ii</sup> *Crito* 50a. Strauss’s translation.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] “Or do you think it is<sup>iii</sup> possible that a city can exist and not be overturned, where sentence given has no force but is made null by private persons and destroyed?” What shall I say, Criton, to this and other such things? For one could say much, especially an orator, in pleading about the destruction of the law—

**LS:** “Of this law.” This law. That’s important. Yes?

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] of this law which lays down that sentences given must be carried out.

**LS:** Let us stop here for a moment. All laws are destroyed if *the* law regarding the enforcement of punitive sentences is destroyed. Ya? What does this imply regarding law, as law? In other words, that’s the key law. Ya? That’s the law of laws. What does it tell us about law in general?

**Student:** That it depends on force for its enactment—

**LS:** All laws depend on sanctions. Ya? On sanctions. Now if this principle of sanctions is denied, all laws are denied. All laws are laws by virtue of having human sanctions.<sup>12</sup> Now I exaggerate, but for good reason: law is essentially punitive. Without that punitive appendage, the law is not law. And if the laws are destroyed, the city is destroyed. By fleeing, Socrates would be the most unjust of men, because he would hurt the whole *polis*, not only this or that individual. This seems to settle the issue. But it is not yet asserted; it’s all still a question. Why? Why<sup>13</sup> does this not settle the issue? How does he go on? “Or shall we say to the Laws.” Yes? Go on.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] Or shall I answer the Laws—

**LS:** Not “I”: “we.” Oh God, he is very unintelligent. It is very important who speaks, whether Socrates speaks or Socrates and Crito jointly. Ya? And that’s easy. I mean, that is not—

**Student:** Why does he say, “Tell me Socrates,” and then he says, “You are trying to destroy us?” Why is the number changing?

**LS:** <sup>14</sup>Well, Plato was a great man. Ya? The translator is almost certainly not a great man. So if Plato does something strange it is worth considering, but if the translator commits a simple blunder in translation which no second term student of Greek would commit—ya? So? Good.<sup>15</sup>

**Same Student:** Why does it say—or does the Greek say “you would destroy me?”

**Student:** No,<sup>16</sup> that’s in the Greek, *hēmas*.

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<sup>iii</sup> The student reads from the Rouse translation, in *Great Dialogues of Plato* (NY: Mentor-New American Library, 1956). Rouse omits “is.”

**LS:** Yes, well,<sup>17</sup> first—no, the *polis* speaks, and then the *polis* is replaced by the Laws. That is the whole thing. First you have the Athenians. Ya? The Athenians. Well, there are all kinds of Athenians, you know. It's not necessarily something impressive. Then you have the *polis*. Now the Athenians are here in an official capacity. That's something impressive. But still [they are] by no means infallible, because they go by majority vote and so on and so on. And then you get the Laws, and the *polis* disappears. The Laws are somewhere in the clouds. Ya?

**Student:** But this transition takes place in another sentence.

**LS:** Why not?<sup>18</sup> Yes, sure. That is clear.<sup>19</sup> But the point is that although the *polis* addresses Socrates, Socrates does not answer but asks Crito: What shall *we* answer? You know? You see, that brings it out most clearly, that Socrates does not answer, but<sup>20</sup> Crito answers on behalf of both Crito and Socrates. So Socrates is really ironical, as I always said: You always raise questions and don't answer them. Ya? Here he raises questions, and Crito answers them on Socrates's behalf. So do you see that it makes sense that Plato—I mean, that the sage Plato does these strange things, as distinguished from the unsage translator<sup>21</sup> who [is] not aware of these things. Yes?

**Student:** It is absolutely clear in the Greek that the *polis* and not the Laws is speaking?

**LS:** At the beginning?

**Same Student:** At the beginning.

**LS:** Sure. I mean, "Tell *me*." Yes? "Tell singular me, O Socrates." The addressee is in the singular, Socrates. Of course. Ya? And the speaker is also in the singular, so it cannot be the Laws. Now what then does he say? What do the laws say? No, what do we say to the laws?

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] "The reason is that the state wronged me, and did not judge the case right"?

**LS:** "Wronged *us*." Also important, because it's a joint action of Crito and Socrates, and preceded by an action of the *polis* against both of them, because Crito too is hurt: he loses his friend.

[Soc.:] "Because the *polis* did wrong to us and did not decide the trial correctly?" Is that what we shall say?

[Crito:] That, by Zeus, O Socrates! (50a-c)

That's it, the whole issue. In other words, the city has no right to do wrong, and if it does wrong, it ceases to be respectable. You must have heard that argument in different, in more highfalutin' terms very frequently. "The city acted unjustly against us, and it did not decide the lawsuit correctly:" these are two different things. Why did the city act<sup>22</sup> unjustly against us? Not by deciding the lawsuit; that is the second point. What is the primary injustice of the city, independent of the decision of the lawsuit? The trial. The accusation itself was unjust, meaning it was based on the irrational demand that one must believe in the gods of the city. The law itself

was unjust. And secondly, the trial was incorrect, because<sup>23</sup> the accusers did not *prove* that which they were supposed to. You remember the argument against Meletus. Socrates proved that he believes in the gods of the city. Ya. So in other words, that is the question: Must you obey not only the laws but *unjust* laws? And that is what the Laws themselves have the nerve [LS chuckles] to raise, this question. Now let us see. What then will the Laws say? Ya?

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] “Was that the agreement between us, Socrates?”

**LS:** “Between us and you.” Ya?

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] “Or was it to abide by whatever judgments the state may make?” (50c)

**LS:** Yes. Let us stop here. The first issue is altogether dropped, ya?—the issue of the justice of the laws. One cannot question the laws. One can question only the application of the laws in a given case: Were the laws properly applied? But this cannot be questioned by you, Socrates, because you agreed not to question these legal decisions, as distinguished from the laws themselves. This is a surprising assertion of the Laws. Where did Socrates ever say that?

And then how does he go on? “Now if we were surprised when they say this, they would perhaps say”—yes?<sup>iv</sup> Now let me see. The Laws reply only to Socrates here, you see, although both Socrates and Crito are presented as addressing the Laws. Why? Well, perhaps they know that it’s sufficient for them to persuade Socrates. You see, if Socrates is satisfied that he can’t go out of jail, Crito has to take that decision. Socrates deliberates with himself, you know? This discussion is a kind of deliberation of Socrates with himself, not with Crito. Whether that is sufficient or not remains to be seen. Now let us go on here.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] “Socrates, do not be surprised at what we say, but answer, since you are accustomed to the use of questions and answers. If you please, what do you complain of in us and the state that you try to destroy us? First of all, did we not bring you into life—

**LS:** “Did we not generate you,” ya? It’s an unnecessary prudishness. Ya?

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] “and through us your father took your mother, and begat you?”

**LS:** Yes.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] “Tell us then, are the marriage laws those of us you find fault with? Do you find<sup>v</sup> there is something wrong with them?” “I have no fault to find,” I should say. (50c-d)

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<sup>iv</sup> *Crito* 50c. Strauss’s translation.

<sup>v</sup> Rouse has “think.”

**LS:** Now let us stop here. You see, the Laws imitate Socrates. You know? Since Socrates is so well known for his questioning and answering, the Laws adopt Socrates's procedure. But the crucial point here: We, the Laws, generated you. What does this mean? What would you say if someone would say, if someone said, "Who generated you?" and you would say, "The Laws"? Ya? I mean, look at it from the practical point of view. Ya?

**Mr. Metzel:** Generate the conditions which—

**LS:** Yes, but<sup>24</sup> he doesn't qualify it. He simply says: We generated you.

**Mr. Metzel:** Which in turn may influence—

**LS:** Ya, sure, that is defensible, but they say they generate him. They generate him. That's important. You see, the Laws magnify themselves: they claim to have done something which they couldn't possibly have done. Who did the generating? Man. Ya, man. As Aristotle in his wisdom says, "Man and the sun generate man,"<sup>vi</sup> "sun" meaning the whole natural conditions without which man couldn't be. Here the Laws say [that] the Laws generate men. They push aside nature. They push it aside, and that is of the greatest importance, since the question is nature—natural justice. Yes?

Now let us go on. And Socrates, you see, doesn't blame these marriage laws. He thinks they are perfectly all right. Now?

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] "I have no fault to find," I should say. "Well, the laws about feeding the child and the education in which you were brought up."

**LS:** "In which you *too* were brought up." That's important.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] "Did not those which had that duty do well in directing your father to educate you in mind and body?"<sup>25</sup>

**LS:** In mind and body? "In music and gymnastics." [Laughter] Ya, because that's a long question, whether musical education is not an education of the body, dancing, or whether gymnastic education is really education of the soul. *Republic*, ya? A long story. So you see what criminal understanding—what's the name of that fellow? [Great laughter] The translator, is it this one?

**Same Student:** It's Rouse.

**LS:** Yes, well, he should get a severe reprimand, high crime and misdemeanor.

**Same Student:** He's dead, so—

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<sup>vi</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* 2.2 (194b).

**LS:** I think, well, yes—well, if death were a punishment [laughter], but that we don't know, to say a word. [Laughter] So let us not say it. Now go on.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] “Yes,” I should say. “Very well—”

**LS:** Now let us stop for a moment. So “the education which you too got,” ya, namely, which everyone got, every Athenian. The Laws are silent about what we may call higher education, which not everyone gets. This higher education which Socrates got, he did not owe to the city. This the Laws are decent enough to admit by implication. Yes? ““And after you were generated and fed”” or ““nursed and educated.””

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] “Yes,” I should say. “Very well. When you had been born and brought up and educated, could you say in the first place that you were not our offspring and our slave, you and your ancestors also?”

**LS:** Let us stop here. You see<sup>26</sup> I put the emphasis now on a crucial point: Socrates became by his generation and education the slave of the city. Why the slave? How does a man become a slave?

**Student:** He is bought.

**LS:** Ya, but that presupposes an earlier act. I mean, you are not familiar with the technicalities. You may know it partly from American history. Where did you buy the slave? Probably at a slave market. And [from] where did they come there?

**Student:** From a country conquered.

**LS:** Ya. So in other words, the ground of slavery is coercion. In—

**Student:** By birth.

**LS:** Pardon? That could also be, but that's derivative. Ultimately you come back to acts of coercion. You had no choice in the matter. Well, no one has a choice in being born, as you know. Socrates wasn't asked. There was no *agreement* between him and the *polis*. You will see later on there are two opposite arguments: part of the argument is based on agreement between Socrates and the city; another part of the argument is based on the *opposite* of agreement, namely, coercion. So here, “slave.” Ya? Now go on.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] And if this is so, do you think you have equal rights with us, and whatever we try to do to you, do you think you also have a right to do to us?—your father<sup>vii</sup> you had no equal rights, or against a master, if you had one, so that you might do back whatever was

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<sup>vii</sup> Rouse has “Why, against your father.” It is likely that the student did read this sentence as Rouse had written it, but the words are missing from the audio due to a probable gap in the tape.

done to you; if you were scolded you could not scold back, if beaten you could not beat back, and there were many other such things. (50e-51a)

**LS:** Now let us stop here. The relation of the city to the citizen is despotic—in the strict sense, despotic means the relation of a master to a slave—or paternal. It does not make any difference, as is shown by the fact that the examples are used equally. There is no *agreement* between masters and slaves, between parents and children. Children and slaves have no right to resistance, regardless of what the parents and masters try to do to them. They have no right to use force against their superiors. But does Socrates plan to use force?

**Student:** No.

**LS:** No, but he plans to use deception—I mean, in case he would escape. But may not a child/slave<sup>viii</sup> use deception against his mad father/master in the interest of his father/master, or the father's/master's equals, fellow citizens? For hitting back is permitted in the case of equals, as the Laws tacitly admit. Hitting back is only forbidden when the two partners are unequal. And, you know, that's a great question, whether that may not be done. Here it is discussed in connection with the past, but it is also clear for a reason.

But another conclusion: Socrates is a slave of the city. He belongs entirely to the city. He could have no private life, of course; slaves have no private life. He could do nothing but the affairs of the *polis* as the *polis* understand[s] them.<sup>27</sup> Socrates himself says, “I’m the only true politician in Athens,” in the *Gorgias*.<sup>ix</sup> Ya? But<sup>28</sup> a slave can’t define his duties as he sees them; he has to do the duties as a master imposes on him. The same applies to children. Now Socrates obviously did not do the political things as the *polis* of Athens understood them. The conclusion, at any rate, is that the laws are to be obeyed even if they are unjust. But remember the discussion in the *Apology* on a possible law which forbids philosophy, and Socrates says he will not obey such a law. Will Socrates resist such a law by force? Will he do that? Will he make a picket, and in case the police comes, to run away—he will throw stones at them? No, but what will he do?

**Student:** Deceive them.

**LS:** Pardon?

**Same Student:** Deceive . . .

**LS:** Ya, but<sup>29</sup> I would raise one question. Do you remember what Socrates said in the *Apology* about this famous simile which he uses regarding his relation to the *polis*? He compares himself to<sup>x</sup> a rather small beast, an unpleasant beast. Do you remember? What beast?

**Student:** A gadfly.

**LS:** What does the gadfly do to the horse?

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<sup>viii</sup> Strauss says “child-slash-slave”

<sup>ix</sup> *Gorgias* 521d.

<sup>x</sup> Here the audio skips back to a prior segment for a few seconds, then picks up again at this point.

**Same Student:** He bites it.

**LS:** Force. Force. So there is a kind of force used by Socrates. Ya? But still,<sup>30</sup> you can say that's only a simile. But if Socrates will never use force, why will he never use force against the *polis*? Pardon?

**Student:** He's outnumbered.

**LS:** In other words, he would use force against his mad father. If his mad father would rush out and try to kill his neighbor, he would of course use force against the father. But he wouldn't do that against the *polis* if it is rushing out to do some mad action, because the *polis* is too strong for Socrates. Now if we<sup>31</sup> could stop here,<sup>32</sup> which is of course impossible, we could say the one expert regarding justice, Socrates, advises against the use of force when confronted with such opinions of the many as are backed by overpowering force or coercion. But let us see how it goes on. Up to now<sup>33</sup> he has used only the examples of father and master. Now we come to case of the *polis* again, where we left off.

**Student:** How do we know that the reason is the force of the *polis*, that he wouldn't use deception? He did what you just said.

**LS:** No,<sup>34</sup> deception is not discussed. Ya?

**Same Student:** Oh. Well, why wouldn't he use—

**LS:** Deception is not discussed, so if you draw from these remarks which we just read, the conclusion [that] he might use deception, as Mr. Schrock suggested, that is not excluded.

**Same Student:** But what about force? Why wouldn't he use that? What—

**LS:** No, the principle stated here is, you must not use force against your father or master. Now that is true in case the father or master merely hurts you. But what if they hurt other people? Yes? The other people. Then of course he would use force, even as the child or as the slave, ya? And he would be praised by everyone for doing that.

**Same Student:** The reason that he doesn't use force against his parents, though, isn't because they're stronger. Or against the master.<sup>35</sup> Isn't there a natural relationship or—

**LS:** Yes, sure, but that is not so simple. This is not universally true. There are cases in which you may use force against your father and against your master, namely, if he is mad, to take the simplest case. And the madness may of course be also a highly emotional state, ya?, which is not technically insanity and yet has the effects of insanity. Now let us go on.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] ““But against your country, it seems—””



**LS:** Ya. Now the word used here and throughout is “fatherland.”<sup>36</sup> It is not so familiar a word in English as it is on the European continent, but we have to translate it literally because it has a certain [importance]. That’s important: “fatherland.”

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] ““But against your fatherland, it seems, and the Laws, you shall be allowed to do it! So that, if we were to destroy you because we think it right, then you shall try to destroy us the Laws and your fatherland,<sup>xi</sup> as far as you can—””<sup>37</sup>

**LS:** Let us stop—all right. Go on.

**Reader:**

[Soc.:] ““and you will say you do right in this, you whose care is set upon virtue in very truth?””

**LS:** Yes, let us stop here. The Laws, they admit, attempt to destroy Socrates. They admit that, in the belief that they act justly. Ya? In other words, it is not merely a matter of misinterpretation of the laws by frail human beings. The Laws refer here also to Socrates’s special case. Precisely Socrates has to be a slave of the Laws—precisely so, because he talks all the time of virtue. And the irony is very great, because precisely Socrates cannot be a slave of the Laws. Those<sup>38</sup> who are completely the product of the city, if I may say so—of course not in their body, but who are completely molded by the *polis*—they of course are the slaves of the *polis*. But Socrates is not molded by the city; he has something beyond that. You see, just turn it around. The Laws disregard in this very statement the difference between vulgar virtue, which is a product of the *polis*, and true virtue. Ya? Now? How does he go on?

**Reader:**

““Are you so wise that you failed to see that something else is more precious than father and mother and all your ancestors besides—your fatherland, something more reverend, more holy, of greater value, as the gods judge, and<sup>39</sup> any men that have sense? You must honour and obey and conciliate your country when angry, more than a father; you must either persuade her, or do whatever she commands; you must bear in quiet anything she bids you bear, be it stripes or prison; or if she leads you to war, to be wounded or to die, this you must do, and it is right; you must not give way or retreat or leave your post, but in war and in court and everywhere you must do<sup>40</sup> whatever city and fatherland command, or else convince her where the right lies.”” (51a-c)

**LS:** Literally, “how the right is by nature.” Or “persuade her as [to] what is by nature just.” Ya.

Now you see first, where you began to read, the mother comes in, ya?, who was completely disregarded in the first half. There’s a beautiful discussion of this problem in Locke, *Civil Government*, when his adversary Filmer had always said: Honor thy father; that’s the highest command. And then Locke simply says: But look at what the Bible says: Honor thy father and *mother*. You see? And that destroys immediately the argument in favor of absolute monarchy, which Filmer might not agree with. [Laughter] Ya, but that is of course not what Socrates has in

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<sup>xi</sup> Again (and for all subsequent instances in the translation), Rouse has “country.”

mind. The mother—you remember the mother in the *Clouds*, where the difficulties came not with beating the father, but with beating the mother? Yes? Now the dual domestic authority: if you have a dual authority, you have necessarily the possibility of conflict. Ya? And that applies of course also to the interesting case of father and fatherland. The father may be a traitor, for example. He may be a traitor, and whom do you obey—I mean, whom do you respect in that case? Now here it is of course decided simply in favor of the *polis*. The *polis* takes precedence of the parents on the basis of the presumed omnipotence of the Laws, because it was then not your father who generated you, or your grandfathers indirectly, but the fatherland which generated you.

Now this statement about the most venerable—after the gods, I take it, is the fatherland.<sup>41</sup> But earlier, when he had almost mentioned the soul—but he really didn't mention it; he walked around it—that was in 48a3. He said: X, which is not the body, more venerable than the body by far. That leads to the very interesting question: What is more venerable, more worthy of honor, the fatherland or the soul? A problem with which you are familiar on the basis of the Christian tradition. You know? The soul—and the statement from the anti-Christian point of view by Cosimo de Medici. How did he say it? He was more concerned with the salvation of the fatherland than with the salvation of the soul. Ya? Now that's a problem. Ya? That's a problem here indicated. Is the soul more venerable than the fatherland, or rather not?

There is a fuller discussion of this subject at the beginning of the fifth book of the *Laws*. You may try to persuade the Laws how the just is by nature, which means in plain English: the Laws as laws don't know it. They don't know that. No claim is made at any point that the Laws are divine, of superhuman wisdom. It's not made. That's very important. Although they appear like gods, no such claim is made. Someone wanted to say something. Was it Mr. Cohen? No. Okay, go on, Rabbi Weiss, where you left off.

**Reader:**

[Soc:] “‘Violence is not allowed against mother or father, much less against your country.’ What shall we answer to this, Criton? Shall we say the Laws are speaking the truth, or not?”

[Crito:] “I think they are.”

**LS:** You see. You see, in the first place he drops now the master/slave thing, which is very good to do because that is a very odious thing. Ya? If the country—if you are simply the slave of the *polis*. But what is the implication? What is the difference between master/slave and parents/children?

**Student:** The parents rule for the benefit of the children.

**LS:** Exactly. In the master/slave [relation], that this is a rule for the benefit of the slave is a questionable assertion. But that the parents rule for the benefit of the children is a plausible assertion. So in other words, if the Laws have any leg to stand on, it must be not their power but it must be their beneficial character. And that we must see, what comes out of that. Crito, you see, not Socrates, says one must not use violence against the fatherland. And of course that is also not the practical question. They are not going to use violence, as we have seen before. It would be only a matter of a minor deception. Yes. Go on here.

**Reader:**

[Soc:] “The Laws might say, perhaps, ‘See then, Socrates, whether we are speaking the truth when we say that you do wrong to us now in this attempt. We who brought you into being, who brought you up, educated you, gave you and all the other citizens a share of all the beautiful things we could—’”

**LS:** Yes, well—yes, “we could.” Ya? “Of which we are capable.” You see—now see, only the Laws make clear the limitations of their gifts, ya? They gave a lot of things, but they didn’t give everything. The beneficence of the *polis* or of the Laws is limited. What did they not give? What *could* they not give? They gave many wonderful things—they gave him wonderful military training and gave him training in propriety and good, decent conduct and so forth. What did they not give him?

**Student:** Wisdom.

**LS:** Ya. You remember that passage near the beginning, the many cannot do: give us wisdom, sensibility. Therefore the silence on philosophy in the *Crito*, severely observed, is crucial. If philosophy were considered, the whole thing would have to be reconsidered. We would—Socrates would still arrive at this conclusion, to stay in prison and to die, but not on these grounds. What these grounds are, we must see. Yes?

**Reader:**

[Soc:] “‘Yet we proclaim, by granting permission to any of the Athenians who wishes that when he has passed the muster and sees the public business and us the Laws, anyone who does not like us has leave to take what is his and go where he will. None of us Laws will stand in the way or dissuade him; if one of you does not like us and the city and wishes to go to a colony, or if he prefers to emigrate somewhere else, he may go wherever he wishes and take whatever is his.’”

**LS:** Ya. You see, now the Laws formally repudiate their despotic character. No compulsion is asserted. Slaves do not have this permission to go away if they don’t like their masters, but the Athenian has this right. The ground of obedience—you see here now, but this is not only a distinction between the city or the Laws and the master, but also a distinction between the Laws and the father. You cannot repudiate your father. Your relation to your father is entirely involuntary in its character. But the relation—the ground of obedience to the Laws is entirely voluntary, and that leads to great consequences. The relation of children to fathers is not voluntary; therefore the partners are unequal. But if the relation between city and citizen should prove to be entirely voluntary, the partners would be equal. It would be a contract, as is later suggested. The movement of thought here is a movement <sup>42</sup>from one ground of obedience to an entirely different ground of obedience: the first based on involuntariness, compulsion; the other based on perfect voluntariness. If voluntariness is a basis of reasonable obedience, ya?, if you are obliged only by virtue of a free agreement which you made in full possession of your mind, not under duress and not deceived, if that is the essence of reasonable obedience, then of course what becomes of obedience to parents? That has to be reconsidered in each case. In other words, one may—if this is true, if voluntariness is the basis of reasonable obedience, one may resist <sup>43</sup>rulers whose rule is based on force alone.

If you would read this more carefully, this passage which we just read, you would see there are two formulations of that. First, a very broad permission: every day the herald appears in the market and says, “Every Athenian who doesn’t like it here may leave.” And later on, the much more cautious formulation. By the way, the first formulation, which is very funny, has nevertheless a very important theoretical backing. I don’t know whether you know Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. According to the strict teaching of Rousseau—which in practice he did not maintain, fortunately—every meeting of the citizen body has to begin with the question: Do you wish to preserve the constitution which you have established before, or do you wish to introduce a new one? Perfect reconsideration of the whole legal order. Ya? That is absolute voluntariness. But the two cases are different. Here it is the citizen body; the individual citizen has no choice. No. For Rousseau, he has a choice. The right to emigration—emigration—is essential if the social contract is to be just, otherwise it would be compulsion. You see that the fundamental principle of the so-called contractual doctrine is here stated. That is of course well known in the literature. But the opposite principle is also stated, you know, the analogy with the father/child relation. Ya, but is it really so absolutely voluntary that Socrates—is it, or is this a question? Why not?

**Mr. Metzel:** Well, first, economic considerations might make it very hard for him to leave.

**LS:** That’s one point, ya, and another—<sup>44</sup>and you know, he has all kinds of friends and so on. Yes, but—good. What did you want to say, Mr. . . .

**Student:** . . . ideas and so forth—

**LS:** Sure, ya, but—

**Same Student:** . . . by the poets . . . educated to obey the laws . . .

**LS:** Yes, but Socrates is not an intellectual, and so he has a certain inner freedom from that. Ya?

**Student:** If he went elsewhere, he wouldn’t be a citizen.

**LS:** Ya, but he made clear in the *Apology* that exile is not a great evil: it is an evil, but not a great evil. What are the alternatives? What would he do? I mean, what is the alternative? He doesn’t like the laws of Athens. What does he do?

**Student:** He has to go to another city, whose laws may be worse.

**LS:** Ya. Or even—well, living in that city is not voluntary. That’s the point. So there is no simple, hundred percent free contractual relation. It is necessary for him to live in the city. Ya. Now go on.

**Reader:**

““But if any one of you remains, when he sees in what manner we decide lawsuits and manage other public business—””

**LS:** You see, now these Laws reveal themselves to be the Athenians. Ya? Laws do not administer the city; that is done by human beings. We must never forget that the Laws are—how shall I say?—glorified Athenians. That’s all. But that doesn’t come to sight. Yes?

**Reader:**

“‘we say that he has now agreed in fact to do whatever we command; and we say that the disobedient man does wrong in three ways when he disobeys us: firstly, because we are his parents, secondly because we are his nurturers, and thirdly, because he agreed to obey us and neither obeys us nor convinces us if we do anything not right; although we give him his chance, and we do not savagely command him to do what we bid, but we leave him a choice either to do it or to convince us—and he does neither.’”

**LS:** Yes, you see, once—“we don’t—do not savagely command,” we are not masters of slaves. Complete repudiation of the first ground. If the command—if the ruler is a savage commander—would command savagely, without giving the ruled a say in the matter, there is no ground to obedience. The ground of obedience, we can say, is a combination of compulsion and agreement. Compulsion is there, and not only because the Laws have this punitive clause, but because man has to live in a city. And at the same time, agreement. That is beautifully presented. That is the secret of justice, as Plato sees it. That is indicated very beautifully at the beginning of the *Republic* in that scene where:

“‘Socrates,’ said Polemarchus, ‘I do believe you are starting back to town and leaving us.’

“‘You have guessed right,’ I answered.

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘you see what a large party we are.’

“‘I do.’

“‘Unless you are more than a match for us, then you must stay here.’” [Ya? Compulsion. Many fists against two fists.—LS]

“‘Isn’t there an alternative?’ said I.

“‘We might convince you that you must let us go.’” [Persuasion in opposition to compulsion.—LS]

“‘How will you convince us if we refuse to listen?’” [Here, how will you convince the Laws if they refuse to listen?—LS]

“‘We cannot,’ said Glaucon.” [Glaucon gives in to force, superior force—LS]

“‘Well, we shall refuse. Make up your minds to that.’” [Socrates says, ‘No, I don’t bow to force.’—LS]

“‘Here, Adeimantus interposed [who is a much more sophisticated young man than Polemarchus; Polemarchus means a ‘war lord’—LS], “‘Don’t you even know that in the evening there’s going to be a torch race on horseback in honor of the goddess?’

“‘On horseback!’ I exclaimed. ‘That’s something new. How will they do it? Are the riders going to race with torches and hand them on to another?’

“‘Just so,’ said Polemarchus” [and so on—LS]. “‘So please stay and don’t disappoint us.’

“‘It looks as if we had better stay,’ said Glaucon.

“‘Well,’ said I, ‘if it seems, we really must do it.’”<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>xii</sup> *Republic* 327c-328b. (Cornford translation.)

“If it seems” meaning if it is the decision of the citizen body, we do it. You see, compulsion and persuasion that combined brings about political justice. Where were we? Ya, now go on. Ya?

**Reader:**

[Crito]: “These charges will lie upon you also, Socrates, if you do what you design; and on you more than anyone else in the whole fatherland.” Suppose I say—

**LS:** No, “You, not the least of the Athenians, but rather among those who are . . . Yes?

**Reader:**

Suppose I say then, “Why so, pray?”—perhaps they might retort that I have made this agreement with them more completely than anyone else in the city.

**LS:** You see the obligation of . . .<sup>xiii</sup> by the Laws, which is based on agreement, is a matter of degree. There is no provision for that in the modern contractual doctrines. Ya? That you contract—someone is more obliged than someone else. Socrates is perhaps under a greater obligation to obey the Laws than most others, or even than all others. Now why is Socrates under such a special obligation to obey the Laws? Why has he made a stronger contract than the others? You see, the contract is not such a simple legal instrument that you can say a stronger or weaker contract. Ya? I think the answer is given in the sequel.

**Reader:**

“Socrates,” they would say, “we have great proofs that you are pleased with us and the city. You would never have been so remarkably more constant in living here than the other Athenians, if you had not been remarkably more pleased with us. You never went out of the city to a holy festival, or anywhere else at all, except sometimes on campaign; you never made any other journey abroad like other people; you had no desire to see other cities or to know other laws, but we and our city were enough for you: so completely you chose us and agreed to live as a citizen under us, and indeed got your family in the city, which obviously pleased you.”

**LS:** Ya. Now, you see the proof is of course now a problem. Ya? Socrates, he says: You had no desire to know of other laws. In the sequel, that’s clearly contradicted. Socrates had knowledge of other laws, and he wouldn’t have acquired it except for having a desire to know of them. Or else it could also be [that] Socrates was not interested in *any* laws, and therefore <sup>45</sup>the whole reasoning collapses. If he has no interest in any laws, then of course also not in the Athenian laws. Ya? Now go on.

**Reader:**

“Further, in the court itself, it was open to you to propose the penalty of banishment, if you wished, and to do with the consent of the city what you now attempt to do without it. Then you gave yourself airs, and pretended that you did not object to die, but you chose death before banishment, as you said.”

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<sup>xiii</sup> There is a skip in the tape here.

**LS:** Ya, let us stop. Now let me recapitulate the argument. Socrates was not obliged by compulsion. This much is clear. Socrates was obliged by benefits, because gratitude is the natural reaction of a decent human being to benefits. But he was—that is true. But he was not obliged by the city, by the greatest benefits; therefore the greatest obligation is not to the *polis*. The soul is more venerable than the fatherland, and the soul gets its proper food not from the city. Certainly Socrates was not obliged by agreement with the Athenian laws. He stayed in Athens since there was no trouble on account of his philosophizing and as long as there was no trouble. He has no reason [to leave]. When the trouble started, he was too old to leave. The practical question is that he should flee from prison *now*, to go into exile *now*. That is the question. But then the Laws make an absolutely sensible point: Socrates could have gone into exile with the consent of the Laws. He merely should have said, <sup>46</sup>when the accusers said the punishment should be death, he should say: Give me exile. They would have accepted it. So Socrates stays. The true ground of his decision *now* is because he *preferred* death to exile. Yes, I think we—Mr. Gildin, you wanted to say something?

**Mr. Gildin:** Yeah, there was. I don't know what this means, but it puzzled me. In addressing Socrates, they on two occasions put nursing him in the center, and then at the very end they say, "Listen to us, Socrates, who nursed you." I wondered if—I don't know why, but I wondered if—

**LS:** Yes, we read that just a short while ago, when he says the three—in 51e6, yes? "We generated you, we nursed you, and you made the agreement." Ya?

**Mr. Gildin:** And also earlier, "We generated you. Do you object to our laws about nursing, do you object to our laws about—" [50d]

**LS:** Ya, sure. You see—no, in other words, really the temporal sequence. But secondly, it is centered because nursing—*trephein*<sup>xiv</sup>—education would still be the highest. And that is the same in Greek. What the *polis* gives you, that, I think, is the meaning, is average, mediocre kind of formation, not the highest formation. Mr. Faulkner?

**Mr. Faulkner:** Could you discuss the nature of Socrates's injustice, that is, rather the nature of the injustice that is done by the laws to him? On the surface, it seems to be perfectly just that he was convicted. I mean, after all, he didn't believe in—

**LS:** Ya. That, I'm afraid, is so. Ya?

**Mr. Faulkner:** But previously you distinguished between two sorts of facets, if you will, of justice: law, justice of the city—law; and something a little deeper, and that is hurt. Is the injustice done to Socrates bound up some way with the fact that thereby the city is harmed? Or Socrates was doing good to the city even though he was disobeying the law?

**LS:** We must make some distinctions in order to answer your question, and I don't know yet which distinctions, so let me think aloud. Now the first step is, of course: Is it possible that the law is unjust? Ya? I think there is no question that Socrates thought so and tried to live without that, and you will see, no one can live without from time to time saying—even the extreme, most

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<sup>xiv</sup> The tape was changed at this point. (The audiofile for session 14 begins at this point.)

extreme legal positivists can't say it. For example, if there should be a law according to which all those whose second name begins with an A have to pay ten times the taxes than those whose names begin with <sup>47</sup>another letter: now everyone in his senses, *everyone* would say that's an unjust law. Why? Because the ground of the discrimination has nothing to do with what is relevant for—regarding unequal taxation. Ya? So there are unjust things. Good.

**Mr. Faulkner:** But is this law unjust? Socrates may think so, but it seems to me a reasonable sort of law that a city should require belief in certain—

**LS:** Ya, that—ya, all right. <sup>48</sup>What is then Socrates's crime? Given. Let us assume that there must be gods, and these gods must be defined in terms intelligible to the meanest capacities, and then Socrates cannot believe in them. Ya? What—all right. But Socrates can't believe in them. He does not believe in them. He is the criminal, but qualified: an involuntary criminal. Involuntary criminal. And I think it is a general principle of justice that someone who commits a crime involuntarily has to be treated a bit better than those who commit a crime with malice aforethought. Ya? And Socrates was—I mean, that is possible. You must not forget this. Some of you and perhaps all of you have read the *Republic*. The *Republic* is the only theoretically complete answer to this problem: the only solution for Socrates is a *polis* in which the philosophers rule, and therefore of course philosophy is permitted without any strings attached.

**Mr. Faulkner:** Looking at it from the point of view of this *polis*, in spite of the fact that Socrates acted, one might say committed a crime involuntarily, it still may be a crime. And he may be treated differently, but the treating differently does not go to the extent of not treating his activities as a crime in spite of the fact that the punishment—

**LS:** Ya, sure. Sure, that is—well, that is one of the troubles, or one of the inconveniences of human life, that the highest type of man can appear in the company of criminals. Ya? That is—

**Mr. Faulkner:** But isn't the problem really deeper, that in fact Socrates's activity *did harm* the *polis*?

**LS:** Ya, that is really a question—

**Mr. Faulkner:** That can be one story: actually did harm the *polis*; that is, he might have helped to engender unbelief in the gods.

**LS:** Ya, but if—that would only be true if he spread that unbelief, and that he denies. He says there is not a word of truth that he ever had intercourse with such fellows as Strepsiades.

**Mr. Faulkner:** But it's possible to say that his unbelief might spread, even if not by his intention; that is, the news that Socrates is a very intelligent man.

**LS:** But then you can also say: All right, let us then make it a strict rule that not only is the public utterance of philosophic statements prohibited, but anything of this kind. You know? In other words, in the moment, <sup>49</sup>what will you do? The suspicion that this guy philosophizes suffices for killing him: that is a very bad legal principle, suspicion as sufficient ground for



condemnation—really very bad, because that will spread, too, to other things. Yes? The suspicion of murder will then be regarded as a sufficient ground for condemning an innocent man. So what can you do? What can you do? But you can also argue as follows. The complete prohibition of philosophy, <sup>50</sup>the complete and unqualified prohibition of philosophy could do harm to the *polis*. A simple example from the military sphere which I gave on a former occasion, <sup>51</sup>the soldiers getting panicky because of an eclipse of the sun, and then a bright general who has talked to Anaxagoras tells him: Oh, that's easy. It has nothing—it doesn't mean divine punishment; it means simply a certain relation of sun and moon, and that is all there is to it. Don't worry. And the soldiers fight, win the battle. Good for the *polis*.

So that if—now if I use seemingly, how should I say it, flippant language, I do not even apologize for that, but it is sometimes good not to talk in highfalutin' words. You know? The problem is of the utmost gravity, of course. <sup>52</sup>All classical thought was *haunted* by this problem, that there is no *elegant* solution to the problem of the relation between *polis* and philosophy. There is no elegant solution. <sup>53</sup>They need one another and yet also they repel one another. It is a complicated marriage, but there must be a marriage. I mean, in other words, if you argue that you can't live without *polises*, everyone would admit that. But that you—one can also show that you can't live without philosophy. The *polis* needs philosophy, because otherwise it will become a savage tribe, and with the certain great inconveniences which that entails. And so the *polis* needs philosophy: that's proven all the time by Plato and by Aristotle. But that doesn't mean that the relation is unqualifiedly harmonious. That is not possible . . . The modern liberal doctrine—and, I mean, for the time being I merely restate the classical thought, only I don't say that it's true—but for our better understanding of the whole of political thought, it is important to realize that modern liberalism is great in the impressive attempt (not what now is called liberalism, <sup>54</sup>[but] this great movement of the last centuries) to bring about a perfect harmony between philosophy and society by conceiving of philosophy or science as unqualifiedly beneficial to society. In the words of Bacon, the function of science is to “relieve man's estate.”<sup>xv</sup> Now if that is the function of philosophy and science, there is perfect harmony. But you—that this . . . and you know it from John Dewey and others, I mean, it's clear there is no problem; and even to suspect a problem is a sign of a deplorable obscurantism. But that there is a problem, we, after the death of John Dewey, have come to realize that he perhaps—when did he die, exactly?

**Student:** In about '52.

**LS:** '52. Well, I had to . . . last year. But, I mean, the atomic bomb is a famous mess;<sup>xvi</sup> the atomic bomb and all its accompaniments have shown that there is a real problem. <sup>55</sup>If science tries to become simply beneficial in the sense in which every ordinary citizen understands beneficial, then science becomes a social *power*. And again, I defer to a famous liberal principle: Power corrupts! And don't think that science cannot be corrupted by power. It comes into the service. Science doesn't dictate. I mean, you know that story: the scientists were against the bombing of Hiroshima, whatever the merits or demerits of that action may have been. But they didn't decide: the government decides, of course. And so the modern solution is only elegant on paper by saying science is absolutely free because there is no possibility of a conflict. That is not so if you look at the facts. And, as I say, up to a certain point the modern solution had a great

<sup>xv</sup> *Novum Organum*, book 1.

<sup>xvi</sup> “famous mess” is a guess as to what Strauss says; it is not quite clear.

plausibility: the abolition of the plague, of all the plagues, and of polio, on the one [hand]—and the enormous infant mortality enormously reduced, and all this kind of thing—and yet the other side, the . . . which is still with us in spite of the Marxists, and so that is not so simple. I mean, one has to understand the classical notion, if only because the modern solution is not so elegantly perfect that we do not need some further light on this subject. Mr. Johnson, you want to say something.

**Mr. Johnson:** I was just wondering about his statement where the laws were complimenting him for loving the city—

**LS:** Ah, good.

**Mr. Johnson:** showing<sup>xvii</sup> that he really demonstrated this by never going out of the city on a holy festival. I was wondering if that really literally—

**LS:** Well that—no, from *theōria*, to a procession. You can say that. *Theōria* means a procession, a holy procession, originally, but that's already meaning any spectacle, anything at which you look . . . Ya. And what does this—

**Mr. Johnson:** Well, if the holy aspect of the thing was really—

**LS:** Ya, perhaps. I mean, I wasn't quite clear . . . sentence like that. Perhaps you are right. But I would have to know more than I do about the practice of wise Athenians. Ya? Whether it was regarded as a sign of piety that a man . . . If that is true, then you are right.

**Student:** I wonder if you could clear up something for me, the distinction between the *polis* and the laws as they appear here, because they both appear, supposedly, in interchanging roles. And he says: Both in war and in law courts and everywhere else, you must do whatever your city and your country demands or else persuade *it* in accordance with universal justice. That's about 51b.

**LS:** Ya, 51b end. Ya?

**Same Student:** It doesn't say that you have to persuade the laws.

**LS:** But later on—

**Same Student:** And later on it says also, you know, that “you will leave this place, when you do, as the victim of a wrong done not by us, the laws, but by your fellow men.” [54c]

**LS:** Ya, ya. <sup>56</sup>But the laws also say: *We* make the decisions. Ya? In other words: We are not merely the laws in 51e, and we administer the *polis* in the other respects, too. The point is this. As long as he speaks of the Athenians or of the *polis*, <sup>57</sup>and even of the fatherland, he means the human beings. But when he speaks of the laws, he hypostatizes <sup>58</sup>something which is only by virtue of human being. But this hypostatization is not completely senseless, because in a way the laws are, *after* they have been established, above the human beings. Ya? I mean, that is the

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<sup>xvii</sup> Crito 52b.

famous, therefore—did you ever hear of the *Pure Theory of Law*, by Kelsen?<sup>xviii</sup> Well, that plays a certain role in legal discussion, and that is an attempt to take this absoluteness of the laws absolutely literally. Ya? And then infinite troubles arise, because then the question arises: What is a law? Well, it must of course be not merely on the statute book; it must also be in fact enforced, i.e., by human beings. And then you—in other words, the mere validity, regardless of facticity. Ya? The human beings are facts [LS raps on the table], what they do. The laws are oughts, not facts. But these oughts, which then are—oughts is a question. But the positive laws are not mere oughts, they are also facts [LS chuckles]; otherwise they wouldn't be valid laws, laws which are actually enforced. And so the absolutization of the laws serves the function to ascribe [to] the laws a sanctity, a supremacy, which they cannot have, which they could have only in one case: if they were simply perfect.

Now two laws are examined: the laws regarding marriage—but if you call that an examination; they are at least alluded to—the laws regarding marriage and the laws regarding the education of infants, you could almost say, of children. But there are other laws which have to be considered. For example, the implicit law not to philosophize, against philosophizing. Ya? This is of course not mentioned here: *the* only law which counts, as far as Socrates is concerned. The argument is meant to convince Crito, and [at] that it succeeds. Where—we must now go on, gentlemen and ladies. Where were we? In 51c6 to 7, I believe?<sup>59</sup>

**Reader:**

“when you do not respect us Laws, trying as you are to destroy us, but you do what the commonest slave—”

**LS:** No, no, only a little bit before. We didn't finish that, I believe. Ya?

**Reader:**

“Then you gave yourself airs—”

**LS:** “And you are not ashamed of those speeches.” Ya?

**Reader:**

“when you do not respect us Laws, trying as you are to destroy us, but you do what the commonest slave would do, you try to take to your heels, contrary to the agreements and contracts by which you consented to live as a citizen with us.”

**LS:** You see, the funny thing is, the slave never contracted, of course; <sup>60</sup>the slave never contracted not running away. Ya? And the running away of the slave is a most dastardly act, from the point of view of the masters. But if you think of a decent slave—I mean, of a fellow, a tough and honorable fellow taken prisoner in a war, he would not regard this as such a grave thing, as a dastardly thing. Yes. Now?

**Reader:**

“First then, answer us even this, whether we tell the truth when we say you agreed to live in conformity with us, in fact although not in word, or whether that is not true.”

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<sup>xviii</sup> Hans Kelsen, *The Pure Theory of Law* (1934).

**LS:** You see, “in deed but not by speech.” Socrates never said that the laws of Athens are simply perfect, by deed, by his action, as his action is interpreted by the laws. But the action—I mean, Socrates’s staying in Athens all the time can be interpreted also in a different point of view. Yes?

**Mr. Gildin:** Does the grammar permit the interpretation, “to be governed in deed but not in speech?”

**LS:** It *must* be.

**Mr. Gildin:** I mean, “agreed in deed, not in speech,” as distinguished from—

**LS:** “*But*.” Even “*but* not in speech” is there. “That you would live according to us in deed”—I mean, “you agreed to live according to us by deed but not by speech.” “But” is in the original.

**Mr. Gildin:** Ya, but what I mean is “the agreement”: Is it to the agreement that the distinction between deed and speech refers, or to the governing, or to the being governed?

**LS:** That could be; both is possible. Both is possible, but it is more simple to understand it in the way in which I did it, and I believe that everyone would say. But it’s—of course that ambiguity exists, ya. Yes? Now go on. “What shall we say to that, Crito?”

**Reader:**

[Soc:] “Must we not agree?”

[Crito:] “We must indeed, Socrates.”

**LS:** You see, Socrates doesn’t answer; Crito answers. Yes?

**Reader:**

They would say then: “And so you are breaking your bargains and agreements with us, which you made under no compulsion, and not deceived; you were not compelled to decide in a short time, but you had seventy years in which you could have gone away, if you did not like us, or if the agreements did not seem to you just.”

**LS:** You see—ya, the laws don’t claim to be just, only the *agreements* were just. The laws are in a way very honest, you see. Yes?

**Reader:**

“But you did not prefer Lacedaemon or Crete, which you always declare to be under good laws, nor any other city, Hellenic or barbarian; but you were less out of town than the lame or the blind or the others who are maimed: so much more remarkably than the other Athenians you liked the city and us, the Laws, that is clear—for what city could please without laws?”

**LS:** Ya. You note the absurdity of the argument here: that lawlessness is worst doesn’t of course prove that any given laws are good, are pleasing. That anyone would prefer life in a policed

country—or almost anyone—to life in a desert<sup>61</sup> doesn't mean<sup>62</sup> [at all] that he's pleased by these particular rules. Ya. Go on.

**Reader:**

“And now then, will you not abide by your agreements? Yes, if you obey us, Socrates, and do not make yourself ridiculous by leaving the city.”

**LS:** Ya. So this is the argument, the proof that justice demands that Socrates stays. It's finished. Finished. And yet there is an appendix. Let us read the beginning, why there is need for any further argument.

**Reader:**

“For consider again: Suppose you do thus break and violate any bit of them, what good will it do to yourself or your friends?”

**LS:** Ya. Let us stop here. Now what does this argument which begins now here mean in the light of the preceding? The issue is settled, because the only question was whether it was just or not. But perhaps not. The fact that you commit an unjust action perhaps does not decide the issue, because the grounds of justice are not so clear as they seem to be if you read only superficially. More generally stated, there are profitable crimes. What would be the profit of *your* crime? In other words, we get now a discussion of the subject independently of justice, entirely on the basis of expediency. That begins here. Yes?

**Reader:**

“It is plain enough that your friends themselves also will risk being banished and deprived of their citizen's rights, or losing all their property. And you yourself—”

**LS:** You see, that is the answer to—yes, “you all will be”—with the friends. Ya? Socrates takes up the argument of Crito: You are right: you all will be ruined. Ya? You all will be ruined if I escape now. That's this. Now that's all he says about the friends. Then there comes a long argument, relatively long, about the good to *Socrates*.<sup>63</sup> What would be the profit for him? And then in the last section, the children. Three arguments—the children. And the center one is the profit for Socrates, I think—how a criminal would argue, you know: his own profit would be the most important, no? Yes?

**Reader:**

“And you yourself, if you go to one of the cities nearest, Thebes or Megara—for both are under good laws—you will come as an enemy, Socrates, to their constitution.”

**LS:** “To their”—<sup>64</sup>“to their regime.” Yes?

**Mr. Metzel:** Why, except in his role as a philosopher, would he come as an enemy, if the agreement is here?

**LS:** There is nothing said about Socrates as a philosopher in the whole—

**Mr. Metzel:** No, but why then would he come as an enemy?

**LS:** That is not considered. I mean, the fact that there was in Thebes a Pythagorean colony, <sup>65</sup>a colony of Pythagorean philosophers who would have enjoyed having Socrates with them—two came to Athens, Simmias and Cebes, and stayed with him when he died. They would have been delighted to have him in Thebes. Ya? It's not considered.

**Mr. Metzel:** Why then do they say he would be coming as an enemy to those governments? Wouldn't he, under the previous argument, be making an agreement with those governments, since he comes to them?

**LS:** Ya, but let us first finish that now. That—I mean, the laws have some argument. Now let us see.

**Reader:**

“And whoever have care for their own cities will think you a destroyer of laws, and look askance at you, and you will confirm the judges in their opinion, so that they will believe they decided aright in their judgment; for whoever is a destroyer of laws would surely be thought to be a corrupter of young men and foolish people.”

**LS:** Ya. Now you see, this is a long story. He says: You will come as an enemy of their constitution, as he translates. Yes, the Greek word *politeia* has a variety of meanings. It means also<sup>66</sup> of their “citizenhood,” if you could coin that word, of their citizen—because the word “citizenship” has a narrow meaning now—of their living as citizens. “Of their civic life” would be one translation. But *politeia* means also the *regime*, a regime which is a democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy and what have you, whatever it may be. Now that is of course a subject which is completely eluded by our fine absolutized laws, that the laws are essentially related to a regime: the democratic laws differ from the oligarchic laws, and so on. These laws which are here speaking are of course democratic laws, and no word is said about that.

Now Thebes and Megara were not democratic—and [there was] the whole phenomenon of *political* exiles who were accepted with delight by the corresponding cities, say, a democratic exile was accepted by a democratic city, naturally and vice versa. And so<sup>67</sup> whether he broke a law or not there, it didn't make any difference—I mean, not ordinary crime, but if he was in prison <sup>68</sup>because of his democratic convictions in an oligarchic city and he got out of that by hook and by crook, that of course was considered as we would consider now someone who would get out of a Soviet jail. Would we say, “You broke out of a Soviet jail? You will destroy all American laws”? Nonsense. That's an allusion to this thing. So exiles were not such an uncommon thing—I mean exiles, even exiles who *illegally* eluded the regime of their city. It's a gross simplification of the problem here, a disregard of all relevant considerations regarding law. That was the point the lady made last time about the political crimes. Ya? I mean, the Greeks didn't have the concept of the political criminal which we have, but it of course affects the situation, because those on the side of these criminals didn't regard them as criminals, and so on. Ya? There was no absolute concept of political criminal—I mean, regardless of whether you are communist, fascist, or democratic. But if you were a democrat, you did not regard a man who was technically a criminal in an oligarchic city as a criminal but as a lover of freedom, and the

others said a lover of decency. Ya? Oligarchs or aristocrats. And you see also another point which comes out here: They will suspect you, ya? They will think badly about you. Respect for the opinion of the many is indicated. You will confirm the judges in their opinion, he says. This also may allude to the fact that in their opinion <sup>69</sup>you were disloyal to the Athenian democracy, a point never mentioned otherwise.

Yes? Now if you think of ordinary criminals, Socrates is of course perfectly right. I mean, a fugitive from justice because he has stolen or robbed <sup>70</sup>is not a respectable man anywhere. That is perfectly true. But the question is whether that is what you meant. But the point is, as a philosopher, that didn't exist. But if Socrates had the reputation of not being a hundred percent sound regarding democracy, <sup>71</sup>came to a nondemocratic city, there were plenty of people—you know that Socrates was regarded as a laconizer, you know, a man who admired Sparta and Crete. Here the Laws themselves [LS raps on the table] say that. Now if he would go to an oligarchic city, what in Athens would make him suspect would make him commendable in that other city.

**Student:** Given his statement before, that he preferred death to exile, and coming in the light of *that* statement as an exile . . . would utterly disgrace him?

**LS:** Socrates gives now the reasons—I mean, or rather makes the Laws give the reasons why he didn't want to go into exile. Whether these are the true reasons remains to be seen, because we are not yet through. But first of all, I mean quite superficially, but massively, he's a fugitive from justice, and that is surely not a recommendation for anybody. But if however it is specified he is a fugitive from the Cheka, or however they may call it now, ya? Well, that's no longer a fugitive from justice. Or the Gestapo.<sup>xix</sup> Ya? You see, the political element affects it immediately. And of course, if he would say he is a fugitive from justice because he didn't believe in the gods of the city, as a philosopher that would also be not a recommendation, as became clear in my discussion with Mr. Faulkner. But if he would say—if it would appear without any untruth that there was some passionate democratic reaction—you know that the ordinary interpretation of Socrates's trial now is that this had nothing to do with impiety, but was an act of revenge on the part of the radical democratic party against all these things which had happened: there was the story of Alcibiades, there was the story of Critias, and they had all been related to Socrates. That is the official view now. I think that is wrong, because it massively contradicts what Xenophon and Plato say all the time, but it has an element of truth, as Xenophon indicates.

**Mr. Metzel:** I'm still wondering. The agreement and contract theory . . . earlier . . . here hold only in the case of a democracy and nothing—

**LS:** No.

**Mr. Metzel:** No, I didn't think so. In that case—

**LS:** No. That's exactly the point. It is a universal theory of legal obligation which sins by virtue of its universality. You know, you had these famous doctrines of the grounds of political

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<sup>xix</sup> Cheka was the secret soviet police, established by Lenin in 1917, which became the NKVD and then the KGB; the Gestapo was the Nazi secret police (Geheime Staatspolizei), established in 1933.

obligation in the nineteenth century, Green<sup>xx</sup> and other people. Ya, but these states, the duty or obligation to the state, but what Plato would say: To which state?

**Mr. Metzel:** Yes, but—

**LS:** Which state? Because this obviously makes a difference whether it is a reasonable state or an unreasonable state,<sup>72</sup> and there are various kinds of unreasonable states. There is a degree of unreasonableness where there cannot be any question of obligation but mere ceding to force. But if it is reasonably unreasonable [LS chuckles], then it is already a matter of serious concern. Perhaps one should protect it because the evil of a change might be worse. But if it is simply a reasonable state, of course obligation.

**Mr. Metzel:** If Socrates were to escape, he would be set—he would be given the liberty to choose, given the conditions here. He'd have funds from friends and he could probably prevail upon them to send him anywhere. If he goes to a city, is not his going a tacit assumption that he plans to obey the laws there? He is agreeing—he is choosing that city out of many, that constitution. What then makes him unacceptable to that folks?

**LS:** According to the reasons stated, because he comes as a fugitive from justice, and therefore as a man who has broken—

**Mr. Metzel:** A fugitive from another city's justice.

**LS:** Ya. Well, and this other city probably also has a different kind of political order, a different regime. Surely. Ya, but that is only what I say: the argument of the Laws, with a capital L, suffers from generality. The problem of obedience to the laws cannot be so simply decided. On the other hand—and that is why Plato, one reason why he wrote the dialogue as he did: as a crude rule of thumb, it is a sound teaching. People should really be law-abiding, by all means. There are cases where it is not possible to be law-abiding, but don't teach people what is true in extreme cases, because that has a bad effect. That makes them extremists themselves, and that's not good for any society. But there are extreme cases. And in these extreme cases—and I think any one of you can find examples or—I hope fictitious examples where he would not obey the law. Mr. Anastaplo<sup>xxi</sup>—I don't know if some you will know him, has not been admitted to the bar here in Illinois because he stated this principle. He stated it, I think, very soberly, but it is of course an undeniable principle. But it is also a principle which is—how should I say it?—<sup>73</sup>which one shouldn't teach in the first grade of elementary school, because it is also a disconcerting point. Yes? Now go on.

**Reader:**

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<sup>xx</sup> T. H. Green (1836-1882). See *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (1895).

<sup>xxi</sup> George Anastaplo (1925-2014) studied with Strauss at the University of Chicago, from which he received his Ph.D. in 1964. Trained in the law, Anastaplo was denied admission to the Illinois Bar in 1950 when he refused to answer the question whether he was a member of the Communist Party. Anastaplo sued the Illinois Bar, and the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the Illinois Bar in a 5-4 decision. Anastaplo taught in the University of Chicago's Basic Program and at the Loyola University School of Law.



“Then will you avoid well-governed cities and the most decent men? If you do, will your life be worth living? Or will you approach these, and will you be shameless enough to talk—how, Socrates? The same sort of talk as here, how virtue and justice is most precious for mankind, and law and order?”

**LS:** Notice the distinction between virtue and justice here. Ya? That’s important. But let us go on first.

**Reader:**

“Don’t you think that the whole business of Socrates will be a notorious, nasty story? You must think so. And suppose you decamp from these places, and go to the friends of Criton in Thessaly. The greatest disorder and laxity is found there, and perhaps they would like to hear from you how comically you played truant from that prison with some disguise on, how you changed your looks with a rough cloak or some things as runaways wrap around them. Won’t someone say, ‘You, an old man, with probably only a short time left for life; did you dare to break the greatest laws and do you still shamefully desire to live?’ Perhaps no one—”

**LS:** Let us stop here for one moment. You see again the references to opinion. You know, “What bad a figure will you cut?” Ya? Will you cut. And the other point which he makes here: Crito had said the condemnation and everything else was a comedy. You remember that? <sup>74</sup>This was disgracefully mismanaged, the whole thing, from the start, a ridiculous affair. Now Socrates says: Well [LS chuckles], if you talk of ridiculousness, what is more ridiculous than if I would put on a disguise, say, as a woman, and then there would exist the absolutely ridiculous, or someone would recognize me<sup>xxii</sup> . . . But you see, that’s also opinion of the many here, the ridiculous. And you see also the importance of Socrates’s old age is mentioned here again. Yes? “Perhaps,” he says. Ya?

**Reader:**

“Perhaps no one will, if you do not make yourself disagreeable to anyone.”

**LS:** Ya. “If you do not”—ya, “if you do not *hypēi*,” “pain someone,” “If you do not—”

**Student:** Irritate.

**LS:** “Irritate someone.” And that is impossible. It’s impossible to live without giving pain to other people. That’s important, very important for the argument here, because it is unjust to do *evil* to a man, but how do people judge of evil, generally speaking? By the *pain* done to them. And that is crudely speaking also the view of the laws. Now if this is so, that of course creates a great problem. What is the value of laws which take such a crude, merely subjective criterion instead of the true criterion? Because what is truly good and evil would have to be defined by experts. Again, the old story. The laws have not been defined by experts. Ya? But if—no, but if—

**Reader:**

“If you do, Socrates, you will hear plenty of ugly names to your disgrace.”

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<sup>xxii</sup> LS is chuckling throughout this sentence.

**LS:** You see, a reputation.

**Reader:**

“So you will live, at every creature’s beck and every creature’s slave; and what will be your business?—eating and drinking in Thessaly, as if you had traveled abroad to dine in Thessaly!”

**LS:** Yes, so “dine.” “Dine,” the Greek word can mean all kinds of meals, but it means also the dinner or supper, the evening meal. Ya? You have an enjoyable *evening* of your life in Thessaly [LS chuckles]. Ya? Good. Because they were very hospitable: gangster type of hospitality. Ya?

**Reader:**

“Where will your talks be, our talks about justice and all the other virtues?”

**LS:** You see, here justice is subsumed under virtue. For many, it was distinguished from virtue. Yes?

**Reader:**

“Suppose you want to live for the children’s sake, to bring them up and educate them. Will you take them to Thessaly, and bring them up and educate them there, and make them foreigners, that they may enjoy that too?”

**LS:** In other words, the implication: exile is such a terrible thing that that is the worst thing you could do to your children, contrary to what was said in the *Apology*. Ya?

**Reader:**

“Perhaps not, but if they are brought up here while you live, will they be better brought up and educated better while you are separated from them?”

**LS:** Ya, that depends on the very grave question what kind of a father Socrates was. About two hundred years ago a German theologian, I believe, wrote a treatise: Socrates was neither a dutiful husband nor a laudable father and family man,<sup>xxiii</sup> and I suggest that you [LS chuckles]—unfortunately it’s written in Latin. They bring all together all things, probably also much gossip, about Socrates. Socrates, you know, was never at home. That appears perfectly from the dialogues. He went home to sleep. [LS laughs] That is at the end of the *Banquet* conversation. Ya? He went home for sleep, but he left the education of the children—occasionally he had one conversation with one of his sons who complained about the nagging of his mother. That’s the only report we have in Plato or Xenophon.<sup>xxiv</sup> So maybe they would have better off without him. We don’t know. [Laughter] Yes?

**Reader:**

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<sup>xxiii</sup> Friedrich Mentz and Friedrich Wilhelm Sommer, *Socrates nec officiosus Maritus nec Laudandus Paterfamilias* (Leipzig: Tietze, 1716).

<sup>xxiv</sup> See Socrates’s conversation with his eldest son, Lamprocles, in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2. 2.1.

“Yes, for your friends will care for them. Will they care for them then if you migrate to Thessaly, but not if you migrate for Hades? Oh yes, we must believe that they will, if there is any good in those who say they are your friends.”

**LS:** So in other words, <sup>75</sup>there is no ground whatever, no ground of expediency <sup>76</sup>[for] why you should leave prison. He leaves his children here to the friends. The word “friend”—the Greek word is not the ordinary word for friends, but that other word, *epitēdeioi*, which means the serviceable or the useful ones, not those for whom you have affection. In the *Apology*, toward the end, you will recall he left his children, in a way, to his condemners. Ya? At the end of the *Apology*. And there is of course perfect agreement, because these kind of friends, as Crito and the condemners have one thing in common: they will bring up Socrates’s children—I mean, at least the decent ones among them—in vulgar virtue. I mean in common decency. But this vulgar virtue is a virtue which understands virtue instrumentally. Virtue—you remember that in the argument in the *Apology*: you have to be virtuous if you want to have money, because otherwise you will not get it and you will not keep it. You remember? That Socrates’s children will learn both from the condemners and from Crito. But this vulgar virtue is a thing of which Socrates doesn’t take care and cannot take care, so maybe it’s really better <sup>77</sup>for the children if Socrates is not around. Ya?

**Reader:**

[Crito]: “Then listen to us, Socrates, who reared you; do not value children or life or anything else above the right, so that when you come to the world below you may have all these things to plead before the magistrates there. For if you do what you intend, things clearly do not seem any better for you in this world, and you will find no more justice and piety here, nor will any of your people; and when you come to the next world, it will be no better. As things are, if you depart—”

**LS:** You see, there is no reference to justice and piety in the next world, because your doing just and pious acts is limited to this world. In the next world, you will be assigned your place according to what the just and pious acts you did in this. Ya? Yes?

**Reader:**

“As things are, if you depart, you will depart wronged not by us, the Laws, but by human beings.”

**LS:** You see, the Laws are <sup>78</sup>immune. That was a misadministration of laws, a misadministration of the Laws, not an act of the Laws, contrary to what the very Laws themselves have said before, that they administer. The Laws are a product of the Athenian citizen body, i.e., of the majority, and the same majority which established the law condemned Socrates. So there is no—that is, just as in the *Apology*, the distinction between the first accusers (you remember?) and the jury was such a fiction. Socrates showed the jury an image of itself by describing the first accusers. Here he turns it around. He turns it around. He makes the Athenians forget themselves. Ya?

**Reader:**

“But if you escape in this ugly way, after requiting wrong with wrong and damage with damage, and after breaking your own bargains and agreements with us, and doing evil to those you least ought to wrong, yourself and your friends and your country and us, then we shall be angry with

you living, and in the next world our brothers the Laws in the house of Hades will not receive you as a friend, for they will know that you tried to destroy us as far as you could. But do not let Criton persuade you to do what he said; let *us* rather persuade you.”

**LS:** Go on.

**Reader:**

[Soc]: “This, I assure you, my dear comrade Criton, is what I seem to hear, as the mystic revelers think they hear the pipes; so in my ears the sound of these words keeps humming and makes me deaf to other things. As far as I can see, you may be sure that whatever you say contrary to this, you will say in vain. However, if you think you can do any good, speak.”

[Crito]: “But, my dear Socrates, I have nothing to say.”

[Soc]: “Then let it be, Criton, and let us do in this way, since in this way God is leading us.”

**LS:** Yes, “the god,” we say. Where one cannot—I mean, the question of how to understand this expression we have discussed before. That’s it. Yes?

Now what then is the problem—I mean, what do we learn about justice from this discussion? I think this distinction between justice and virtue, which is made near the end in 53c, is of the utmost importance. What is virtue when it is distinguished from justice? I mean, <sup>79</sup>of course Socrates sometimes presents justice as a subdivision of virtue—for example, in the *Republic*. But then justice means something very different from that, what it means now. There, justice means to mind one’s own business: more precisely, to do one’s own work well. But this is not possible except in the best regime, because in an imperfect regime <sup>80</sup>you may not do your own work: you may have gotten the wrong kind of work, not the one which is truly fitting for you. So that’s another story. That’s not the justice of which he speaks here.

Now what is the virtue of which he speaks here, in contradistinction to justice? We have seen it. What is the greatest good?

**Student:** Philosophy?

**LS:** Ya, or wisdom. Wisdom. So virtue is wisdom much as knowledge is . . . But what is justice then? Justice would then not be wisdom or knowledge proper. Do we have any alternatives suggested here? That is not the highest meaning of justice, but an important one. What is the most simple notion of justice which we understand and which was—

**Student:** To obey the law.

**LS:** To—yes, to obey the law. That’s it. To obey the laws. And what does it mean, however, in the light of the analysis given in this dialogue: to obey the laws regardless of what the laws are, regardless of whether the laws are sound or unsound, just or unjust?

**Student:** Wisdom is united with justice.

**LS:** No, I mean this kind of justice which is identical with obeying the laws regardless of the character and the quality of the laws. Complying with the opinion of the many. That is, even on a higher level, something necessary—I mean, not in the simplistic crude sense that you have to obey any law regardless. From this point of view, justice is identical with humanity in the sense of being kind and friendly to people, especially to people inferior to a man. That is not identical with the human perfection proper, but it accompanies it. Because if you go—I mean, one could show that by going into any detail. For example, [in]justice means—that was the broadest statement there—to inflict evil on a human being. Murder is one form of inflicting evil on a human being. But is death objectively, scientifically, an evil for every human being? Think not only of a man who is suffering from an incurable disease and living incapable of thinking for a moment because of pain. Not only that, but there can be someone who is not bodily sick at all; he may be an absolutely corrupt individual, who cannot be legally caught through some evidence or whatnot and who does an infinite mischief to all, to every human being whom he comes in contact with. Evil would be—death would be good for him. What does the law say? I mean, the law says: No, under no circumstances can you kill such a man. Because what would happen? The law must speak crudely and universally. This <sup>81</sup>permission would be necessarily abused. Necessarily. It is much better to err on the side of this unqualified prohibition than on the other side of laxity. That, I think, is what Socrates means. And yet <sup>82</sup>while good is crudely defined here and no sophistication is permitted, yet the alternatives are impossible. Are impossible. In other words, it is really an opinion which is frozen into law for good reasons. I think that is the status of law in Plato's opinion, and therefore one must really distinguish between justice and wisdom. And there is a connection, obviously, because there are good reasons for this complying with opinion. But the complying with opinion. This is, I think, what he means.<sup>83</sup>

But to return to the general question and to conclude this seminar, as we must: in studying the *Crito*, we must never forget one simple thing. There are two questions which must be kept separate, although there is only one answer given to both. Is a jailbreak unqualifiedly unjust, or is it unjust in the case of Socrates . . . as a practical deliberation? They mean, of course, the case of Socrates. And we must distinguish between the universal principle and the reasons applied to Socrates's case in particular. Something of this kind happens of course in all Platonic dialogues, because in all Platonic dialogues—no Platonic dialogue is a treatise. In every Platonic dialogue, individual human beings in an individual situation, under individual circumstances, meet, and where these individual elements affect the discussion of the universal. But here, I think, it is in a way particularly striking.

Now this is—I'll conclude this seminar with that, unless there is one or the other point you would like to raise. A few more minutes I could still—I shall be glad to spend with—. Mr. Johnson?

**Mr. Johnson:** It's just a side question, I mean, because I remember Spinoza somehow last quarter, when . . . philosophy as a private thing is brought up—

**LS:** Pardon?

**Mr. Johnson:** Philosophy being in Spinoza's philosophy as a private thing in which philosophers in almost any regime could philosophize in private, compared with what has just

come out of the *Apology* and the *Crito*, in which it is construed in passing in some sense as a public thing. I mean, that there must be more than one person that does this.

**LS:** I don't understand your question. Do you mean to say whether Plato would have agreed, or Socrates, with Spinoza's view that as far as philosophy is concerned the difference of regimes is negligible?

**Mr. Johnson:** I couldn't imagine him agreeing with that—

**LS:** No, I think he would not have agreed with that.

**Mr. Johnson:** But what seemed to me was the sort of contemplation of God as the highest thing that can be—and then that this can be a private thing, and once this is reached as a decision . . . whole political doctrine, but still on account of the fact that because the two could be separated, and then another question would come into play.

**LS:** Yes. But still, is this ascent—to say nothing of the end of the ascent—is this ascent not affected by the character of the society in which men live? And I think even Spinoza would say that ultimately—otherwise it wouldn't have been interesting, so interesting politically as it was, but surely in the case of Plato. I mean, even in the *Apology* you find a trace of it <sup>84</sup>when he describes what happened to him after the battle of the Arginusae. You know the trial of the generals? He disagreed with a whim of the majority and they didn't like it, but nothing happened to him. But when he disagreed with the whim of the Thirty Tyrants, you know?, then he said that if that regime had not been so short-lived he would have been killed by them. And so the democracy in Athens lasted almost as long as Socrates's life, and it took them seventy years to hurt him, whereas this tyranny would have taken less than a year. So there would be a difference, surely.

But that is also—incidentally, that is one point which I should have mentioned, but I have spoken of it so frequently in other classes that I thought I could not mention it. When Socrates discusses exile in the expediency argument, ya, not [the] justice argument: Where should he go? To well-ordered cities like Thebes and Megara, or to Thessaly? <sup>85</sup>Two other well-ordered cities were mentioned: Sparta and Crete. Now. <sup>86</sup>There is . . . the disjunction would be this: an ill-ordered city is undesirable. <sup>87</sup>I mean Thessaly. So only well-ordered cities. Thebes and Megara, when he would go there, everyone would know him. Why? Because they are nearby. <sup>88</sup>Of course, Sparta was so xenophobic that it wasn't a good place to go there; I mean, unless you had deserved so well of Sparta as Xenophon did that they gave him an estate, it was not a healthy place for any foreigner. But Crete would be well-ordered, according to the text, and it is far away. No one would know [of] a stranger from Athens arriving there whether he was a fugitive from justice or not. That, I believe, is the ironical background of the *Laws*, what Socrates would have done if he had accepted Crito's suggestion. He would have gone to Crete and there taught the Cretans the rudiments of civilization, because they were well-ordered in a crude way. They had certain habits of law-abidingness, but the laws were very bad. And then in the *Laws*, he is presented as—no, an Athenian stranger, an Athenian stranger teaches the Cretans how to establish a really good order. And this good order is the *Athenian* order—not the democratic Athenians, the older ones, the ancestral polity which you may remember from when we discussed Aristophanes. You know?

The old order prior to Cleisthenes's reform. The rural squires <sup>89</sup>predominated. That is the alternative. And the practical problem for Socrates was—I mean, stated in theoretical generality and precision: either to leave Athens to a place where his whole past did not count and use his faculties for the benefit of those people—this he could have done even as a man of seventy, or die now. And I think what the true deliberation of Socrates is: What is better for my fellow man? And he felt it was better for his fellow men, and more particularly for his fellow citizens, if they did this and lived to regret it, which they did very soon afterwards. And therefore in a way that marriage between philosophy and the *polis* was consummated by Socrates's death. They—from now on, somehow it was possible, as is shown by the fact, to establish academies—<sup>xxv</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deleted "The agreements are—."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "to—it is—."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "'Not'—had said,."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "if there is—."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "by—."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "and injustice means—."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "the fellow—."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "might—."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "ya?"

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "You see—."

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "that—."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "Law is essentially—."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "is—."

<sup>14</sup> Deleted "Here—that is—."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "That is—."

<sup>16</sup> Deleted "the Greek says—."

<sup>17</sup> Deleted "—yes, you see, there is—."

<sup>18</sup> Deleted "To make it still more—."

<sup>19</sup> Deleted "But here—."

<sup>20</sup> Deleted "Socrates—but the—."

<sup>21</sup> Deleted "who is at—."

<sup>22</sup> Deleted "injust—."

<sup>23</sup> Deleted "the person—."

<sup>24</sup> Deleted "that—."

<sup>25</sup> Deleted "'Yes—'."

<sup>26</sup> Deleted "Socrates—."

<sup>27</sup> Deleted "He—."

<sup>28</sup> Deleted "that is not—that is not—."

<sup>29</sup> Deleted "even—."

<sup>30</sup> Deleted "that is—."

<sup>31</sup> Deleted "would—."

<sup>32</sup> Deleted "which we—."

<sup>33</sup> Deleted "we have not yet—."

<sup>34</sup> Deleted "I didn't discuss the—deception would be not—."

<sup>35</sup> Deleted "There's just—."

<sup>36</sup> Deleted "That is—."

<sup>37</sup> Deleted ", and you will say."

<sup>38</sup> Deleted "who have only—."

<sup>39</sup> Deleted "any man that—."

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<sup>xxv</sup> The audiotape ends at this point.

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “whatever your—.”

<sup>41</sup><sup>41</sup> Changed from “Now why—this statement about—the most venerable—after the gods, I take it—is the fatherland.”

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “an entirely—from two entirely different”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “to.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “ya”

<sup>45</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>46</sup> Deleted “when he was”

<sup>47</sup> Deleted “another conson—”

<sup>48</sup> Deleted “then, yes, then yes then what is the—if you”

<sup>49</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>50</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>51</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>52</sup> Deleted “all thought in”

<sup>53</sup> Deleted “There is a kind of”

<sup>54</sup> Deleted “that is a little bit—I don’t mean that”

<sup>55</sup> Deleted “now if one—by”

<sup>56</sup> Deleted “but that is, but we have”

<sup>57</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>58</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>59</sup> Deleted **Student:** ““Further, in the court itself”—“Further, in the court itself, it was open to you—”

**LS:** Deleted: “Oh, [inaudible words]”

**Same Student:** Oh.

**LS:** Oh, no, no, I’m sorry. Where were we? In 52—

**Same Student:** Oh, I’m sorry.

**LS:** Ya, I know—

**Same Student:** ““And now are you not ashamed of that talk—”

**LS:** No.”

<sup>60</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>61</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>62</sup> Deleted “anything”

<sup>63</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>64</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>65</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>66</sup> Deleted “that of your”

<sup>67</sup> Deleted “to—if”

<sup>68</sup> Deleted “for”

<sup>69</sup> Deleted “that”

<sup>70</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>71</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>72</sup> Deleted “and then”

<sup>73</sup> Deleted “which is not”

<sup>74</sup> Deleted “that was”

<sup>75</sup> Deleted “neither”

<sup>76</sup> Deleted “ya?”

<sup>77</sup> Deleted “for him”

<sup>78</sup> Deleted “they are, you know they are”

<sup>79</sup> Deleted “there are—that, from”

<sup>80</sup> Deleted “you don’t”

<sup>81</sup> Deleted “law”

<sup>82</sup> Deleted “so while this, while the”

<sup>83</sup> Deleted “So for the question of—but for the understanding of”

<sup>84</sup> Deleted “when he says that”

<sup>85</sup> Deleted “now these—but there are”

<sup>86</sup> Deleted “there is—there are two different—there is—of course, the”

<sup>87</sup> Deleted “ya?”



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<sup>88</sup> Deleted “Sparta was”

<sup>89</sup> Deleted “were in”